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A TURCOMAN AND HIS WIFE

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LONDON
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK
1913

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PROVINCIAL RUSSIA

I

CENTRAL RUSSIA

It was in the south-west, in the basin of the Dnieppr, the great waterway between Scandinavia and Constantinople, that the Russian State had its first beginnings. Kieff, and not Moscow, is the real 'mother-city.' But from the fourteenth century Russian history has centred round the 'white-stoned' town on the Moskva, and the principal part in the national development has been played by the Muscovites, or Great Russians. In numbers and importance these by far exceed the other two families of the Russian race, the White and the Little Russians. It was the Muscovite Princes that emancipated Russia from the Tartar yoke. It was the Great Russian stock that, possessing a remarkable instinct and aptitude for colonization, sent forth successive swarms of emigrants to the northern forests and the fertile

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steppes in the south, and that alone of all Slavonic peoples have built up a powerful empire in face of very considerable difficulties. Their religion, their form of government, and their language, they have stamped on the whole nation. In the course of expansion they have absorbed a considerable number of Finnish peoples. While it would be a mistake to infer that the predominant characteristics of the Great Russians are anything but Slavonic, it seems probable that to this infusion of Finnish blood, and not altogether to the more rigorous Northern climate, are due certain modifications of the Slavonic type which are peculiar to them. They have lost in liveliness and gained in strength. They have more endurance and energy, more perseverance and patience, than the Little or White Russians. In physique they are less graceful, but more rigorous.

This prolific stock, endowed with inexhaustible reserves of strength and recuperative powers, has spread in every direction of the empire, adapting itself with peculiar readiness and success to new conditions, but at the same time preserving all the customs that could possibly be retained. Thus, the traveller in Russia will notice a certain sameness in peasant life from Archangel to Astrakhan,

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the same village plan, the same type of houses, of clothes and manners, a sameness which is accentuated by the similarity of the scenery. But variations do arise under the influence of a novel environment, and Russian writers are careful to distinguish between the character of the central peasants and that of the people in the north and in the Urals. The original type is best seen in the central governments in the basin of the River Oka, which for long was a political and ethnological frontier.

This river, one of the great rivers of Europe, has its source in the Government of Oryol, and meets the Volga at Nijni. Its basin is intimately connected with Russian history, and comprises to-day the most populous and most highly developed district in the whole empire. Nowhere is the web of railways closer, nowhere are more people engaged in manufacturing industries. Yet even here the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants are peasant agriculturists. First, then, a word as to the appearance of the country, and this, the reader will remember, applies to rural scenery in Russia generally.

Sluggish rivers, with steep red banks, wind through broad plains. In the distance are dark

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woods of pines or birches, which in the evenings resound with the notes of nightingales. The unfenced communal fields slope gently towards the horizon, and through them, also unfenced, runs the broad stoneless road with deep ruts. There is no strongly marked feature in the landscape. The predominant colour is in summer grey or brown. In spring it is bright, almost dazzling, green, and in winter practically unrelieved white. The feeling of space, of distance, which the people call their great enemy, impresses itself strongly on the mind; all round for a thousand miles is Russia. There are generally no separate homesteads—a feature that must, however, alter largely in no long time, owing to the agricultural reforms inaugurated by M. Stolypin's Government, that aim at establishing the individual and independent farmer, and hence project a revolution of a peaceful but most momentous nature. With the exception of bee-keepers, charcoal-burners, and foresters, whose occupations oblige them to dwell in the woods, the peasants all live in villages. Those whose strips of corn lie at the outskirts of the *mir* land, often ten or fifteen versts from their homes, will spend in harvest-time the nights in the open, and their little fires will twinkle over the fields.

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Great Russian villages vary little from each other, except in size. Occasionally there are rows of trees relieving the monotony of the straight, regularly-built streets, and close by, surrounded by pleasant grounds, there may be a landowner's long one-storied wooden house, with the men's apartments at one end, the women's at the other, and the public rooms in the centre. But most villages are treeless, and, apart from the church, a merchant's stores, the Zemstvo or Local Government Board school, and sometimes a hospital, consist exclusively of the wooden *izbas* of the peasants. They are surrounded by a wattled fence, which lies far enough off to leave a pasture-ground for the cattle. Where the road meets this fence there is a rough wooden gate, with a small hut to shelter the old man who looks after its fastening. A little farther on there is a signpost giving the name of the village and the number of its 'souls,' or male inhabitants. High over the *izbas* rises the white church, with its cross and green cupolas. On the orthodox cross the slanting position of the lowest transverse bar is determined by the old Eastern tradition that Christ was lame. In the Greek religion Zeus took to himself the attributes of mental suffering, and identified him-

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self, for example, with the suppliant. But the Russians in their broad humanitarianism have gone farther. They have not shrunk from making their God physically deformed, alone of Christian peoples, following literally the words of Isaiah: 'For He hath neither form nor comeliness.' So at least a Slavophil might urge, but the notion would be present, if at all, only very dimly in the average Russian mind. Close by the church stands the high belfry. The bells are rung from a little platform near its summit, and generally have a pleasant note. On still summer evenings their pealing tones echo musically far over the fields and woods.

The broad street is merely a continuation of the road, and is equally full of ruts and pits and unexpected chasms. There may be the framework of an *izba* made of round logs caulked with moss and resin set there for seasoning; and there are sure to be some sturdy little black pigs scampering about in search of garbage, crowds of fair-haired children playing on grass patches before the houses, and women gossiping at the wells. These are marked by a succession of long poles, which the Russians call 'cranes.' There are two poles to each well. One of them stands upright, and the middle

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of the other is let into a catch at its top. To one end of this movable pole is attached the rope with the bucket, and to obtain water the other end is pulled down with a second rope. There are long troughs by the wells for watering horses. The peasants do not scruple, however, to use the muddy river water even for culinary or drinking purposes. In general the Great Russian villages are not picturesque. But when they are tree-shaded, and one looks at them in soft evening light from over a wide river or pond, they are steeped in a quiet melancholy beauty of their own. Under the high white church, glowing like silver, cluster the huts, with their roofs of thatch or green iron. Cattle, sheep, and geese, string out over the meadows, of their own accord returning home from pasture. Choir songs, sung by young peasants, float over the water. Then later the stillness is broken only by the sharp rattle of the small wooden clacker with which an old man goes round during the night alarming ne'er-do-wells by his presence.

The huts are generally built end on to the street, and the projecting beams and overhanging gables are often carved with intricate ornamentation. Through the roof, usually in the middle of the side, projects a brick chimney. In winter the huts

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are banked with earth and straw halfway up the small windows. The house stands at one of the corners of a rectangle occupied by the homestead. Somewhere on the street line is a double gate of wood, a large one for carts and a small one for people. The rest of this line is a high wooden fence. Round the other lines range the outhouses, byres, and sheds, and in the middle is the open *dvor*, or court. In it stands a long pole, with a little box at the top for starlings. From this court, and not from the street, the house is generally entered. You go up one or two steps to a porch or small veranda where in summer many of the richer peasants spend their spare time drinking tea. Then you enter a small vestibule called the *sieni*, which is the theme of a famous song. A door from this, again, leads into the dwelling-room, frequently the only room of the *izba*, though above there may be a garret for storing grain and various odds and ends. Generally this room is about fifteen feet by thirteen feet. In the corner is a great stove of clay or whitewashed brick, which is about five feet in length and four feet in breadth, and thus occupies a large proportion of the space. Its door is about a foot above the wooden floor, and in winter, when the wood inside has been

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reduced to red embers, it is shut tight, and the chimney closed so that nothing of the heat may be lost. In winter, too, the snuggest sleeping-place is on its flat top. From it to the corner, diagonally opposite the door, stretches a broad bench which in cold weather is also used as sleeping-quarters. In summer most of the peasants sleep in the outhouses. There are windows on two sides of the room, looking towards the street and into the court. The furniture consists of at least a wooden table and chairs, and a cupboard or two. In the most prominent corner, on a small triangular shelf nearer the ceiling than the floor, are set one or more *ikons*, pictorial half-lengths of Christ, the Mother, and the Saints. The little lamp in front of them is lit on festival days. To them the peasant bows, crossing himself and taking off his cap when he enters the room and after meals or on any solemn occasion. When he yawns, too, he crosses himself to prevent the Evil Spirit from entering his body. On the papered walls are highly coloured lithographs of the late war, of the rewards and punishments in the next world, and photographs of the family, especially soldier sons, the Tsar and his children, and absolutely unknown generals, across whom, heedless of human

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dignity, crawl long files of harmless red *taracans*. In the richer houses one will find clocks in glass cases, superior furniture, and a collection of books, which will include 'Lives of the Saints,' cheap editions of Pushkin, Gogol, and Tolstoy, with very probably a translation of 'The Pilgrim's Progress.' The *izbas* of the present day show little improvement over those of the time of Peter the Great. They are as a rule draughty, insanitary, and insect-ridden, and it is not an unmixed evil that every six or seven years they are burnt down accidentally in a village fire or through private enmity, for the satisfaction of which 'letting loose the red cock' is not an uncommon expedient.

Within recent years the fine physical type of the Great Russian has somewhat deteriorated through insufficient nourishment. He is a tall, well-built man with a singularly dignified face, broad brow and nose, small eyes, white teeth, and flowing beard. His movements are grave, and yet capable of extreme vivacity. In speaking he uses lively gesticulations. The mass of light brown hair is parted in the middle, and shaved off behind at the nape of the neck, so that at the back it falls like a dense curtain, cut evenly above the tanned, wrinkled skin. The splendid white teeth, per-

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NEW YEAR'S CUSTOM: CHOOSING A BRIDE

petually polished by the black rye bread, which is the staple food, are not so characteristic of the younger generation. The usual headgear is a peaked blue yachting cap, but many wear their old soldier's cap or a round felt hat. A gaily-coloured, generally red, shirt fastened at the side of the neck falls over darkish print trousers, and is girdled by a belt at the waist. On the feet are worn thick coarse socks, which, with the ends of the breeks, are hidden by strips of cloth wound round the legs like puttees. These are held in position by cords attached to the *lapti*, or bast shoes. But in summer the peasants in the fields go barefoot, and put on their footgear only before entering a village. On holidays the *lapti* are replaced by top-boots of leather. There is nothing distinctive about the dress of the women, who are not so good-looking as the men. Young girls either go bareheaded or wear a kerchief over the tresses that fall down the back. But for matrons the kerchief is indispensable. The fashion of tying it varies in different districts, and the colours are as the colours of the rainbow. In winter both sexes wear sheepskins, or *tulups*, and great felt boots which reach over the knee, and are kept on at night as well as during the day. Driving in winter, the peasant wears above the

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tulup a heavy loose-fitting greatcoat with a collar of fur or sheepskin. Then, to tie the belt tightly over this multitudinous mass of garments, a friend rests his foot on the other's waist, and tugs both ends of the belt with all his might. Clothes and hair are not free from insects, but the universal custom of taking a vapour bath every Saturday is conducive alike to bodily cleanliness and to longevity.

Like much of the country itself, the Russian peasants are still undeveloped, but infinitely rich in possibilities. Sentimental and sensational writers have been so successful in blurring the real outlines that in England the term *moujik* too often seems to connote at once the darkest and deepest degradation and the victim of a crushing tyranny. The facts are otherwise. On the one hand, the Russian authorities are not so black as they are often painted, and the taxes are comparatively light. The land belongs to the peasants themselves, and in village matters their *mirs*, or councils, enjoy almost unique powers of local government of an extremely democratic type. Secondly, as to the peasant character, the defects have been so accentuated as to overshadow the whole picture. So far from the peasants being, as some writers

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seem to imagine, in a continual beatific condition of intoxication—like Stevenson's gipsies, 'always drunk, simply and truthfully always'—only very rarely in rural districts does one meet those constant topers whom the Russian calls 'bitter drunkards.' The average spent on drink per head is considerably less than in England or Scotland, even allowing for the fact that Russia is a poorer country, and also, despite those conditions of climate, strangely ignored by temperance reformers, which make for heavier drinking in Northern than in warmer climes. Equally undiscriminating is the charge of idleness. When the peasants are idle, it is almost entirely through force of these same climatic conditions, during the long winter when wood has once been carted and the homestead repaired, and when the fields lie feet deep under the snow. But in spring and harvesting they work all day, and a large part of the night as well, with an energy and vigour that remind one of the moujik Gerasim in Turguenieff's powerful and pathetic story 'Mumu,' who, 'when he laid his enormous hands on the plough handle, seemed by his own strength without the help of his horse to cut into the stubborn breast of the earth; and in mowing wielded his sickle so mightily that a young

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birch grove itself, one might fancy, he could at one stroke shear clean from its roots.' They do not, it is true, assign a high value to time, nor, like most other people, do they do more than they are obliged to do, but to level on these grounds a sweeping charge of idleness is less than fair. Perhaps the most telling indictment is on the score of dishonesty. 'Everybody steals,' says one of their own proverbs, with a delightful mixture of candour and blasphemy, 'except Christ—and He would if His hands were not nailed to the Cross.' But it is essential to note a contrast between the peasant's relations on this point towards his fellows on the one hand, and the State and neighbouring landowner on the other. While in the latter case he finds it difficult to distinguish between what is his and not his, and will appropriate, not merely wood from the forests, but even mugs and clothing from the hospital to which he owes restored health or life itself, he will be much less ready to 'convey' from those whom he calls 'our brother.' This difference may be connected with a disguised but indisputable and deep-rooted hostility towards the upper classes, which is, indeed, the inevitable result of historical causes, and which meets well-intentioned measures of the present day with undue suspicion. With regard to

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A CONVENT IN NOVGOROD: NUNS MAKING HAY

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other defects, though it is notoriously difficult to make with certainty generalizations on national character, few would dispute that the peasants are as a rule improvident, untruthful, and obstinate in persevering in error; that they lack resolution, independence, and initiative; that they possess an insatiate capacity for receiving, while their gratitude is not commensurate.

Against these failings must be set unquestioned virtues: sober-mindedness, endurance, practical shrewdness, and a broad tolerance that forms the opposite pole to the spirit which makes Spanish peasants of neighbouring villages stone one another's Madonnas. They are hospitable and kindly, though not to animals. As for human beings, a proverb inculcates, indeed, the precept, 'Beat your wife like your fur'; but the principle is not carried beyond the reasonable limits of corrective castigation permitted to or usurped by the male the whole world over, and in the very same aphorism it is followed by the saving clause, 'and love her like your soul.' Nowhere have children a better time than in Russia. The peasant temperament is pacific, though liable when worked upon to fall into sudden short bursts of blind, elemental passion. Finally, this people is highly gifted intellectually,

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and in this respect resembles far more nearly active-minded Scottish crofters than the heavy-witted agricultural labourers of the Midland shires. Russia possesses an admirable educational system, and though compulsory instruction is not yet established, and girls' education still too much neglected, the military statistics alone show an ever-widening area of intellectual enlightenment. In political matters they manifest as yet little interest except in the land question.

In a famous letter to Gogol, the great literary critic and 'intelligent,' Bielinski wrote: 'Look more carefully, and you will see that the peasants are by nature profoundly atheistic. They have still much superstition, but not a trace of religious feeling. . . . Mystical exaltation is foreign to their nature; for that their minds are too clear and positive, too well endowed with common-sense, and it is this point, perhaps, that decides the enormous historical rôle that they will play in the future.' This opinion, however, was biassed by *a priori* prejudices, and the Slavophil writers, such as the poet Tutcheff, the novelist Dostoyevski, and the philosopher Solovioff, are on the whole nearer the truth. They have insisted on the all but unique spiritual qualities of the people, on the measure of their faith,

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PEASANTS

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resignation, and charity, and on this basis, indeed, have written eloquently on Russia's Messianic mission to Western Europe. Thus, for example, Aksakoff gives what is, perhaps, the finest picture of childhood in the world's literature, when he describes a famine-stricken village through which he and his father passed. 'A sullen-looking peasant said in a rough voice to my father: "It is no joy to work, Aleksai Stepanitch. I would not look at such a field: but weeds and thistles! A whole day you go over three acres and gather a fistful!" My father answered: "What can be done? It is the will of God;" and the sullen-looking reaper replied friendlily: "Of course it is, little father."' Aksakoff makes one of his rare digressions to comment: 'Later I understood the lofty meaning of these simple words that calm all agitation and silence all human protesting murmur, and by whose nourishing strength Orthodox Russia lives till this day.' And one cannot talk long with peasants before being struck by this religious note. With their gift for terse, vigorous, and picturesque language, they constantly startle one by those winged phrases, so rare in English conversation, which vibrate with penetrating insight, truth, and simplicity. But how far these indisputable spiritual qualities are due to the

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Christian religion, and how far to Oriental fatalism and mere native character moulded by past history, it is difficult to say. It is easier to note that they have contributed to retarding material progress, and that in the more advanced districts they are less obvious. There can be no doubt, however, that if faith, resignation, and charity, constitute religion, the Russian peasants as a whole are profoundly religious. It is absurd to limit their religion to idolatrous worship of the *ikon*. It is generally admitted to be largely tinged with mysticism. Mr. Baring, it should be noted, writing with his usual brilliance, but with somewhat less, perhaps, than his usual insight, finds its principal feature in a 'glorious sensibleness.' This is certainly characteristic of the peasants' attitude towards the priest, but the part played by the priest in the religious life—in the broader sense as distinguished from State or Church ordinances — is so small that it is questionable whether terms true of this relation may be applied with propriety to the relation towards God and the *ikons*. It may be observed, finally, that when a peasant is both religious and thoughtful he is inclined to become dissatisfied with the Orthodox Church, and join an evangelical or mystical sect.

Turguenieff, in one of his poems in prose, pictures

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the Sphinx brooding over sandy deserts, with a mysterious gaze, the riddle of which Œdipus alone could solve. Then, as he scans those features and that glance, it flashes across him that they are things which he knows. 'The white low forehead, the prominent cheek-bones, the short straight nose, the finely-chiselled mouth with its white teeth, the soft moustache and curly beard, the small eyes set wide apart, and the shock of parted hair on the head—why, that is you, Carp, Sidor, Simyon, peasant of Yaroslavl, of Ryazan, my fellow countryman, little bone of Russia! Pray, when did you become a Sphinx?' And he concludes by saying that hardly will an Œdipus be found for the Russian Sphinx. It is indeed certain that the peasantry present extraordinary and all but bewildering contrasts, but to ponder Œdipus-like over the meaning of the glance in their 'colourless but deep eyes' is, in the case of a profoundly tender-hearted poet, little likely to yield results of practical value. This passage of Turguenieff is as poignant but as unreal as Ruskin's description of the Swiss mountain-dwellers. Of the good and bad points in the peasant character, both of which have been profoundly influenced by historical conditions, the latter are largely the temporary result of ignorance and isolation, and will be

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obliterated, or at least largely modified, by ameliorated surroundings; while the former appear to lie deeper and be less liable to suffer by the change. Since the emancipation the peasants have made immense progress. And now the rate of improvement can only accelerate with the influence of education, the breaking up of the commune, which was a heavy drag on rural enterprise, the political franchise, and the increased facilities offered by the spread of railways for disposing of surplus crops and developing the internal resources of the country. A great future assuredly lies before this remarkable people, with its physical and mental powers, its vigour, elasticity, and youth. This may be a question of time, but it can scarcely be a matter for doubt.

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SIBERIAN CONVICT

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II

THE NORTH

The North of Russia, the sparsely-inhabited Governments of Archangel and Olonets, is a land of illimitable forests, wastes of moor and tundra, mighty lakes and broad rivers, some deep, reedy, and sluggish, others rushing clear and cascade-broken. To get to Archangel, one travels from Moscow by rail or by ship down the Dvina, or one can sail from Petersburg up the Neva, through the stupendous inland seas of Ladoga and Onega, and then by boats down the Vyg to the Gulf of Onega, where, again, larger vessels ply round the coast towns. Finally, it may be reached by the Arctic Ocean and Barents Sea. By this last route, on August 24, 1553, came the English sailor Richard Chancellor, on his mission to find a Northern maritime route to China and India. With a letter from Edward VI. he went to Ivan the Terrible, who received him with the utmost kindness, and granted valuable concessions and

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commercial privileges. To exploit these an English colony was founded fifty miles up the Dvina, at a village Kholmogory. Archangel was built thirty-one years later, and in the seventeenth century all the Russian trade with England left its wharves. But its brief period of prosperity passed with the foundation of Petersburg. There remain still, however, an English consulate and church, and a considerable colony, employed chiefly in great saw-mills in the neighbourhood, where the men employ an Anglo-Russian jargon. The town stretches for four miles along the right bank of the Dvina, over thirty miles from its mouth. The harbour is free from ice from the first days of May to the first days of October. Owing to the Gulf Stream the ice here melts sooner than in the more southerly Onega Gulf. So, too, when there is a northerly breeze sea-bathing is appreciably warmer than when the wind is from the south. From May to October the port is full of ships engaged in corn and timber traffic, for the Dvina, which is connected by a portage with the Petchora, is a commercial outlet for an enormous tract of country. The level of education in the town is high, but the place itself is dull. It has a museum, a cathedral, and an unworthy statue of the great

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writer and scientist Lomonossoff, who was born in 1711, in a fisherman's cottage near Kholmogory, and who set out on his first momentous visit to Moscow on foot with three borrowed roubles and a load of fish.

There are no other towns of any size in Northern Russia, but at a distance of fourteen hours' sailing from Archangel is the famous and enormously wealthy Solovetski monastery. It is situated on a fairly large wooded island in the Gulf of Onega, dotted with natural and artificial lakes. One of the latter lies under the high turreted wall to the east, while the western wall is washed by the sea. The place is full of the cries of sea-birds and the sound of waves. Every summer fifteen thousand pilgrims visit it, and often as many as a thousand are fed together in the refectory. Founded in 1429, the monastery was greatly enlarged during the years of commercial activity in the north. It has twice been bombarded, once successfully by the English fleet during the Crimean campaign. The other occasion was much earlier, when the monks, passionately devoted to the ancient usages, rejected Nikon's ecclesiastical reforms, and defied for eight years the forces of the Tsar.

These same reforms filled the northern forests

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and the Vyg Valley with Raskolnik, or sectarian, fugitives, to whom the very errors of Holy Writ were sacred and inviolable. Their numbers increased when Peter the Great trampled contemptuously and deliberately on the old Muscovite customs, forbidding long beards and long robes, surrounding himself with foreigners, and toiling with his own imperial hands at the boatman's oar and the executioner's axe. The conviction spread that Peter was Antichrist. Harassed and persecuted by the Tsar's soldiery, the malcontents plunged ever deeper into these impenetrable marshes and forests. The more reasonable settled in peace by the shores of the White Sea, and the wilder orgiastic sects burned themselves in thousands. Of these wild martyrdoms, Merejhovski has painted a remarkable picture in his 'Peter and Alexis,' admirably translated by Mr. Trench. Religious fanaticism is not yet dead in Russia, but it will rarely be seen by a foreigner. Pilgrims, however, he will see everywhere, and near Archangel in the summer the roads are full of them, bound for Solovetski, some of them sensible and sane peasants or from higher classes fulfilling a vow, many of them rascals and vagabonds, many homeless, half-crazed wanderers that journey rest-

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THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY

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lessly from one great shrine to another. Toward these unbalanced naturals that are known as 'God's people,' the peasantry show extreme kindness and not a little reverence. Turguenieff's little sketch of their ravings is thoroughly typical. A traveller takes refuge in a wayside inn from heavy rain, and suddenly hears through the partition a voice say: '"God bless all in this house! God bless! God bless! Amen! Amen!" the voice repeated, prolonging the last syllable of each word in a wild, unnatural fashion. I heard a loud sigh and the sound of a heavy body sinking down on a bench.'

'"Akulina"'—this was a female with the pilgrim—'"handmaiden of God, come here," the voice began again. "See, for as much as I am naked, for as much as I am blessed . . . Ha-ha-ha! T-phew! Lord, my God, Lord, my God, Lord, my God," the voice began to boom like a deacon's before the altar, "Lord, my God, Master of my belly, look on my affliction! Oho-ho! Ha-ha! . . . T-phew! And blessed be this house till the seventh hour!"'

'"Who is that?" I asked my hostess, who entered my room with a samovar.'

'"And that, my little father," she said in a

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hurried whisper, "is a holy man, a man of God. He is not long come to our country, and there, he is pleased to visit us. In such weather! It just runs from him, the little pigeon, in floods! And you should see the chains on him, what like they be—terrible!" '

'"God bless! God bless!" the voice started again. "A', Akulina, Akulinushka, friend! And where is our paradise—our beautiful paradise! . . . In the desert is our paradise . . . our paradise. . . . And this house at the beginning of the world—great happiness—oh-oh-oh!" The voice muttered something indistinctly; then after a long yawn there was another burst of hoarse laughter. This laughter broke out every time as if involuntarily, and every time was followed by angry expectoration.'

'"Ech ma! The master's not here! There is our grief, then," the woman of the house sighed. "He'll say some saving word, and me a woman, it will not stay in my head!" '

Several causes have contributed to make the northern peasant more energetic and independent —not for any *barin* will he doff his hat!—than the moujik of the centre. A large proportion of the population are sectarians, descendants of the

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SELLING THE SACRED FIRE: PILGRIM RETURNING FROM JERUSALEM

old Raskolniks, who are invariably more industrious, self-reliant, and provident, than the adherents of the Orthodox Church. They have, too, in their veins much of the dour, determined Finnish blood that gave rise to the proverb: 'Burn a Karelian, and after three years he's not in ashes!' Being on Government land, they escaped the demoralizing conditions that accompanied private serf-ownership. Something is also due here, as in Siberia, to the influence and propaganda of political exiles. Lastly, a great number of them are not so much agriculturists as trappers, hunters, and fishermen, a stalwart race inured to privations and dangers on flood and in forest. Several authorities see in these northern peasants the strongest branch of the Russian race. In manners they are simple, unsophisticated, and hospitable. In education they are backward, and this explains why there still linger with them dresses, customs, and songs, that have long vanished from Southern Muscovy. Some of the customs breathe an air of a sterner age. Thus, often in the marriage ceremonies the bride's hair is pulled, and a song sung: 'Under the mattress of the marriage bed is a stick of oak, to which is joined a whip of silk: the whip of silk has three ends, and when it scourges the blood

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squirts.' Less savage in colour, but really as primitive, are the words of the bride when about to forfeit her 'divine freedom.' She kneels three times before the *ikons*, saying: 'I make the first bow for the most pious Tsar, I make the second bow for the most pious Tsaritsa, and the third I make for myself, young girl, that the Saviour may have pity on me in the strange house.' Among their neighbours the Lapps, however, 'the bride must shriek and struggle, and be hauled to her new home like a reindeer.' Here there were collected priceless old *bwilinis* that told of the heroes, the peasants' sons, Mikoula and Illya of Murom; and even now, while over great districts of Central Russia industrial life has introduced cheap costumes, cheap tunes, and trivial words, and to some degree justified the factory song, 'O works! O you works! You've demoralized the people,' in the northern villages linger marvellously beautiful home-worked dresses, and a wealth of old refrains, some of which in slow maestuoso touch with almost unendurable pathos the lowest deeps of human sadness; while others, again, treat of rural customs with allegro motifs that reveal a strange new world of melody to Western ears. Typical of this latter kind is the haunting air of

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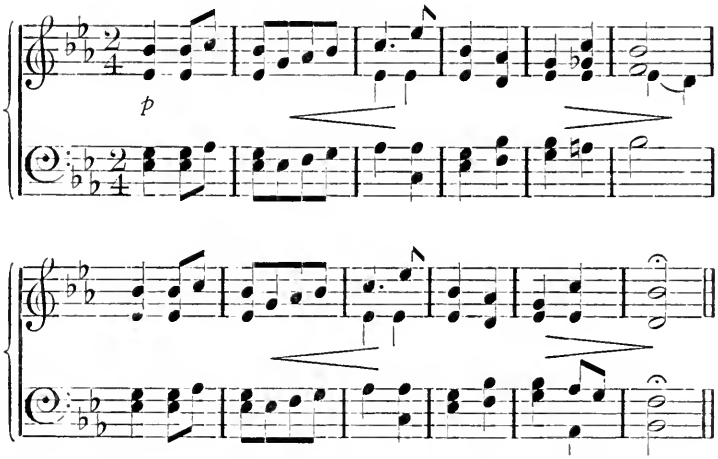
'A moui prosy sayali' ('We have sown the millet-seed'), instinct with the very breath of spring and the smell of country fields:

All the rivers teem with fish, and the woods are infinitely more full of game than in Central Russia, or even the Urals. The coverts abound in woodcock, capercailzie, and tree-partridge, and blackcock perch boldly on village trees. In winter they line in long rows the rime-fringed branches of the birches, and from these as evening falls they fly some hundred yards and plunge headlong into the snow. The force of their impetus carries them deep down, and here they remain till next morning. In spring, before dawn they hold their *tocs*, when the male

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birds vie with each other in flaunting and swaggering before the female. At such moments they are insensible to danger, and it must be confessed that too many Russians take an unsportsmanlike advantage of this opportunity. The forests are full, also, of foxes, wolves, and 'rugged Russian bears.' A *berlog*, or winter home of a bear, is easily marked after the first snowfall, for round it, before he settles for his long slumber, the bear makes a perfect labyrinth of tracks, *qua signa sequendi falleret indeprensus error.* Then later in the season the peasants sell it to a town sportsman, and if a bear is found at home they receive from £4 to £6. On being disturbed, the bear often shoots up like a cork out of a soda-water bottle, scattering a shower of powdery snow, and is shot while his eyes are still blinded by the light. Some keen sportsmen and peasants go bear-hunting armed with nothing but knives.

Wolves are hunted in several ways. One amusing way, a trifle more exciting than a similar ruse described by Herodotus for killing the hippopotamus, is to attract them at night by taking a pig in a sledge through the forest, and by pulling its tail and making it squeak. In summer or autumn they are hunted on horseback in the

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CONVOY OF PRISONERS ON FOOT

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manner so graphically described in 'War and Peace,' with hounds trained to spring simultaneously one to the right and a second to the left of the animal's throat. Then a huntsman gallops up, springs from his horse on to the wolf's back, and plunges his knife in its heart. If the wolf manages to turn his head, the huntsman must expect a mauling. I have seen a heavy knife with a large piece of good Sheffield steel snapped off in just such a case by a wolf's powerful jaws. But the more common though less exhilarating method of hunting is followed in winter. When a pack settles in any place, the carcass of an old horse is left from time to time to keep them from straying elsewhere. Then one fine morning, having made sure that the wolves are there, the hunters sally out for their destruction. The beaters ring them in with fluttering red flags on ropes hung lightly on shrubs, or, if the ground be open, wound round poles set in the snow. These lines of red flags converge at one end, and here the guns stand dressed in white. They must not smoke or move or make a noise of any kind. In quiet, windless weather it is glorious to stand amid the perfect silence and watch the delicate tracery of the frost on the trees or the scintillating

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snow. But all at once a storm of shouts, yells, and execrations, falls on one's ears from a distance. That is made by the beaters who have finished setting up the flags, and are starting to drive the wolves from the other end of the ring. It rouses one to a tense watch for a greyish-brown body moving heavily but rapidly through the snow, with head turned toward the terrifying red flags. In such a case, if a fox appears first, you let it pass; on the other hand, if a ring is made for a fox, and a wolf appears, you shoot. It is sometimes useful to know that a skilled beater can drive a wolf towards whatever gun he pleases.

Clear, calm days come often in the course of a Russian winter. It would be difficult to name a preference for any one of the Russian seasons—the winter; or the spring; or the summer, with its white nights in this northern country, and its dusty roads; or the autumn, with its shooting and fishing, with the forests turning gorgeously yellow, when first the nightingale, then the quail, and then the corncrake, cease crying. Many would declare for the spring, when the woods sound afresh with the long-silenced notes of birds; when the rivers are transformed from stagnant pools to brown masses of swirling water; when grass and bushes and trees

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A BEAR-TRAP

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grow and bud with a rapidity, especially in the north, almost visible to the human eye, and adorn themselves in ever more and more brilliant greenery; when there is a never-ceasing movement on the water, in the fields, the forest, and the sky, until at last, as Aksakoff says, 'Nature attains her full magnificence, and, as it were, of herself grows calm.' But for country dwellers in Russia, though they are spared 'the changing agony of the doubtful spring' familiar to inhabitants of these isles, this season has one great drawback. It is the time of *rasputitsa*, when through melting snow the roads are impossible for either wheels or sledge, and many villages can be approached only by boat. I am half disposed to decide for the winter. It is true that Russia is rightly termed the Land of the North, for by climatic conditions it is virtually shifted several degrees nearer the pole than its actual geographical position. The Lapps have reason for including in their vocabulary twenty words for ice, eleven for cold, forty-one for snow, and twenty-six for the processes of freezing and thawing. But once the snow has made smooth winter roads, and the whole country lies under a sparkling sheet of white, there are constantly days when the peasant children in short sheepskins

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toboggan down sloping fields, and when for any healthy person it is a crying shame to remain indoors. You join the tobogganers, or on the indispensable ski go hunting in the woods or sweeping over the snow-covered fields with long ropes tied to racing sledges. Before turning homewards from skiing, while the driver rests his horses, you may ask him to call for wolves, and if he can—for it requires some knack, as well as lungs like bellows—he will howl in a peculiar drawn-out wail to which, amid the stillness and gathering darkness, may come from far away the sudden answer of a mother-wolf. If the call be repeated, she will come nearer and nearer till the horses shiver with fright. Then 'vperyott!' (Forward!) shouts the driver, and they gallop for home.

On such days mere driving itself is rich in impressions. The runners creak loudly in the frosty air. The narrow track is marked on either side by bundles of straw in Central Russia, but by branches in this northern land where wood is abundant. The driver stands in the front of the sledge wrapped in his warm sheepskin with its tall collar, and his long knout trails behind like a serpent over the snow. When it is somewhat colder, three or five suns burn dully like tarnished copper

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in the sky, and in the evening you watch, entranced, the roll and play of the Northern Lights. The three horses of the *troika* move swiftly in a line—in goose-file, as the Russians say—now over shining expanses of unbroken white, now down avenues of magnificent birches. Over the front horse the driver can exercise little power, and it is trained to become thoroughly familiar with the roads; for it bears a heavy responsibility in stormy days when a *metyel* rages, and the sledge is beyond sight of the village lights and beyond sound of the church bells, rung to guide people home in the drifting snow or darkness. Driving is terrible then. The horses' nostrils become choked with frozen moisture, and every now and again the driver stops to pull out from them great chunks of ice. Korolenko well describes how the jingle of the bells sounds thick and heavy like the sound of a spoon struck against a full tumbler. 'Your breath catches,' he continues in the same passage, 'you blink your eyes—between the eyelashes are icicles. The cold gets in under the clothes, then into the muscles, the bones, to the brain of the bones as is said—and it's not said for nothing. Impressions gradually become dimmer; people seem more disagreeable. . . . In the end you muffle up as close as you can,

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settle a bit more comfortably, and try for one end, as little movement as possible, as little thought as possible. You sit, you gradually freeze, and you wait with a kind of terror till that awful forty to fifty versts' driving be ended.'

In Russian country life, with its enormous distances, horses and driving play a great part. On every highroad are post-stations about twenty miles from each other, where horses must be supplied to all applicants equipped with the necessary papers. The station book shows the number of horses kept and the hours of their departure. Most characteristic of all Russian conveyances is the *tarantass* harnessed to a *troika* (team of three) of roan horses. It is a kind of strong springless phaeton set on four wheels, with a seat for the driver in front and a hood behind. There is a rough low seat for the passengers, which is covered with straw and cushions. On summer roads the three horses are yoked abreast. The centre one, the leader in winter, trots, while the two side-horses gallop with their heads turned sharply outwards. Over the *korienik* (the middle horse) is the high-arched *duga*, or yoke, with its bells. The bearing-line is attached to the top of the *duga*. With *tarantass* and *troika* the Russian gentry do all their travelling when out of railway districts.

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In the fast movement, the harmonious action of the horses, and the fine symmetry of the harness, there is something at once barbaric and splendid, the spirit of which Gogol has attempted to seize in the passage that closes the first book of his novel 'Dead Souls':

'It is as if a mysterious power had caught you upon its wing, as if you yourself were flying and everything were flying; the verst-posts fly, the merchants on the boxes of their *kibitkas* fly to meet you, the wood flies on either side, with its dark bands of firs and pines, with its sound of axe-blows and cawing of rooks; all the road flies you know not whither, and is lost in the distance. There is something terrible involved in this rushing past you of things, where you see everything hazily and cannot mark anything for sure, where only the sky above your head, and the light clouds, and the moon piercing them, seem motionless. Ah! *troika*, bird-*troika*, who invented thee? Of a truth, only a bold race could have given thee birth, only that land where men love not to jest, but which has spread itself steadily and smoothly over half the earth, and where you may count the verst-posts till your eyes swim.'

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III

THE URALS

The long chain of hills that stretch from the Arctic Ocean to the Kirghiz steppes forms a convenient though not a real boundary between Europe and Asia. If we include the continuation of the chain in the islands of Vaigatch and Novaya Zemlya in the north, and in the south the Mugodjai Hills, which terminate between the Caspian and the Aral Seas, the total length of the barrier is considerably over two thousand miles. The name, which is Tartar, means 'the girdle,' or possibly 'the watershed.' As the *Rhipæi montes* the Urals were associated in the minds of Roman poets with snow, frost, and extreme cold. The chain is geologically continuous, but there are several gaps, seven in all, on the continent, as well as the Kara and Yegor Straits in the north. It extends through twenty-eight degrees of latitude, through the four zones of ice tundra forest, and steppe.

On the mainland the northernmost ridge, the

Kara or Pai Khoi Hills, runs in a south-easterly direction, almost at right angles with the principal chain, but in a straight line with the islands. The bluffs of low height rise from the marshy plain only in patches. There is no continuous ridge, and hence the water-line is irregular. By the end of summer all the Ural heights are bare of snow, which lingers only in great masses of névé in sheltered gullies or corries. There are no glaciers. But along the promontories of the Pai Khoi the black cliffs that plunge steeply into the sea are fringed with a perpetual ring of ice, broken only by tempestuous surges or crashing floe. In this dreary, empty country there is one famous peak, Bolvano-Is, or the Hill of Idols. It takes its name from the great rock pinnacles that rise along its serrated crest, and are worshipped by the nomad inhabitants. Seen in the soft Northern nights, these black, human-shaped rocks do indeed suggest sinister powers brooding over the tundras. God knows what is in their thoughts! Do they mourn the desolation of these wet lands, and the silence broken only by the hum of mosquitoes, or are they on tireless watch for some foe lurking under the distant horizon? . . .

The tundras are dotted everywhere with lakes and marshes, and often, even when the ground appears

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solid, the water that fills every depression is betrayed by 'little windows'—that is to say, open wells surrounded by mosses. On their inhospitable plains the only shelter from the north wind is offered by lichen-covered rocks or stream-beds. On the few slopes exposed to the sun grow rowans, the sacred trees of the ancient Finns, alders, and dwarf birches, and sometimes the ground is carpeted with blue aconite and scarlet peonies, glorified by a Russian traveller as 'the last smile of Nature.' But generally the only vegetation is mosses of pale white or red ochre, under whose tufts here and there shelter the leaves of a few crawling shrubs. There are no regular inhabitants: only Samoyede reindeer-hunters from time to time pitch their black *tchoums*, or huts, in that empty land. The word Samoyede means 'cannibal,' literally 'self-eater' or presumably 'eater of that which is like oneself.' The same formation is seen in the word 'samovar,' literally 'self-boiler,' applied to the water-urn heated with charcoal, which is an essential article of Russian furnishing. But the Samoyedes call themselves Netza or Khassova—that is to say, males. They were once a powerful tribe that roamed from the White Sea to the foothills of the Altai. The place-names of the middle Urals are of Samoyede origin.

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A NORTHERN FUR MERCHANT

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Pushed north by Mongolian invaders, they drove westwards the Karelian inhabitants of the tundras, who were more closely connected than themselves with the Finnish stock. This latter people were the Tchonds, known to early Russian writers, the folk 'beyond the portages' who possessed 'enormous territories of the chase, with multitudes of mammoths, foxes, and beavers.' But in his turn the Samoyede came in contact with the stream of Russian colonization northwards. There has been preserved a children's rhyme of the early settlers:

'Come and hunt the Samoyede!
Come and track the Samoyede!
When we find the Samoyede,
We'll cut the Samoyede in two.'

Whether the lines represent actual historical relations is questionable—Russian methods of expansion were as a rule totally different—but at any rate the nomads fell under Russian suzerainty. Politically the bonds were, and have been, always of the lightest, but in other respects civilization left the baneful influence that it so often exercised over primitive peoples. No further additions of note were made to the remarkable Samoyede poetry, which is infused with the proud spirit of the Kalevala. The trade in skins and furs fell into Russian

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hands. Formerly the hunter used to leave his spoil unguarded in his *tchoum* or at a known point in the tundra, secure in the honesty of the native trader, who deposited a notched bit of wood as a receipt. But the Russian appropriated the skins and furs and left nothing. The monstrous stone idols of Vaigatch, where bears and reindeer were sacrificed to Noum and Vesako, were overturned by missionary zeal. A law of 1835 prohibiting encroachment on Samoyede territory was too late to prevent their losing the most valuable tracts to Russians, and especially to the enterprising and astute Ziranes. This people inhabit the Governments of Archangel, Vologda, and Viatka, and, like the Perms and Votiaks farther to the south, belong also to the Finnish race. In the solitudes of the Ural forests they are an unspoilt race of hunters, but where they have come in contact with the weaker Samoyedes their custom of commercial exploitation has made them crafty, treacherous, and tyrannical. Theoretically all these people are Christian, but polygamy is not infrequent, and pagan ideas linger very near the surface. Thus, the Votiak crossing a stream throws a tuft of grass to the current, and cries to the Water Spirit, 'Do not hold me!' The Permian recruit, when he sets out for the barracks and kisses his parents,

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SAMOYEDES

pays obeisance to the Fire Spirit by bowing to the stove.

The Urals proper begin about 68° lat. within the Arctic Circle, and their northern division extends as far south as the Deneshkin Rock, in the sixtieth parallel. From the principal chain a number of subsidiary ridges run out westwards, the most interesting of which culminates in the gaunt precipices of Sablya. Farther south, near the pyramid of Tell-Pos-Is or Nepubi Nior, silver pines, birches, and larches, begin to clothe the lower slopes On the Asiatic side the water drains to the Ob; on the west the hill streams hurry through romantic glens to the Petchora. In one of these, in the upper valley of the Schtchongor, are the famous cascades called the Three Iron Gates, where the cliffs overhanging the dark water are cut into enormous columns by vertical fissures, and are of dazzling whiteness. Along these rivers are the rare villages of the Finnish or Russian settlers, lying at vast distances from each other in the woods. Even within recent years surveyors have found, occasionally, hamlets living in Tolstoyan felicity, ignorant of the nature of a Central Government and the burdens it imposes. Life in these forests has been admirably portrayed by Ryeshnetnikoff, a

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writer of last century, who has described his own youth in a Permian village without much striving after artistic composition, but in straightforward, vigorous prose that flows with freshness and truth. The northern Urals contain the finest peaks of the whole chain. The bold isolated heights with their richly sculptured corries and serrated ridges are real mountains.

This cannot be said of the central and southern Urals, which are for the most part thickly-forested, low, hummocky ridges. Only near the mines as a general rule are the woods cleared. All the central hills are enormously rich in minerals, and comparatively large finds are made also of precious stones, such as sapphires, agates, amethysts, and jasper. Here, too, are obtained the beautiful alexandrite and malachite used so effectively for ornamentation in the Russian churches. The whole country is a treasure-store, still little drawn on and incalculably rich; only coal is absent, and its place is at present easily supplied by the practically boundless forests. Most of the mines in operation—of recent years many have closed—are on the Asiatic side. Here and there are primitive galleries called 'Tchond mines,' in which numerous copper, but no bronze, instruments have

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been found. Their workers may have died out or moved elsewhere before the discovery of bronze. Some of the most productive of these ancient mines, it is said, remain unknown ; the few natives who found them in the heart of the hills kept silence through fear of forced labour, and the secret died with them. But this may be only an interesting tradition. The centre of the mining district is the flourishing town of Yekaterinburg, in the Government of Perm, founded in 1721, where there are a mining school and the head-office of the Government Board of Administration of Mines. It lies in the division between the central and southern Urals, and is only nine hundred feet above sea-level. In this vicinity in 1575 Timoseyeff Yermak with his Cossacks, fleeing from Muscovite troops, made a momentous crossing into Asia. Taking service with the merchants Stroganoff, the ancestors of the noble and wealthy family whose palace is one of the ornaments of the Nevski Prospect, he gradually pushed eastwards, and in 1581 stormed Isker or Sibir, the capital of the Tartan Tsar of the land. Its ruins may still be traced on the right bank of the Irtytch, some fifteen miles beyond Tobolsk. Yermak won pardon for his former depredations by presenting Ivan the

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Terrible with his vast acquisitions. This was the beginning of the long-neglected but inexhaustibly rich empire of Siberia.

The southern Urals begin south of the Yekaterinburg gap, near the sources of the Ufa. Like the central, they abound in mineral wealth. A little to the north of Zlatousk the chain breaks into three separate branches, which open towards the south like a fan. Of these, the most easterly is prolonged in the Mugodjai hills that terminate in the steep plateau of Usturt, between the Caspian and the Aral. The low declivities of the central range sink gradually to the Kirghiz steppes. The western is the most important of the three, and comprises the highest point in the whole Ural system. That is Yaman Tau, a dull, bald hill to the east of the town of Ufa. From this western range a long low band called the Obshtchi Syrt runs north of Orenburg towards the Volga.

Only rarely does the scenery of the southern Urals recall the majestic outlines and savage desolation of the north. There are, indeed, several rocky heights to the north of Ufa that rise not unimpressively over a wilderness of boulder-strewn screes, but they lack the conditions that we associate with real mountain scenery. Of bold con-

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A WOLF-HUNT

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tour, individuality, and splendid or even apparent inaccessibility, the southern Urals have nothing. They have nothing, either, of the intricate sculpture and rich colouring that characterize Skye or Lofoten. For the most part they are steep, densely-forested ridges, of uniform height and featureless monotony. Where a bare summit affords a view-point, the prospect generally is of undistinguishable deep valleys with silver ribbons of water amid the dark green of sharply-rising forests. But where the hill lines end, especially if they run at right angles to a river, the scene is full of a quiet charm. There will be, probably, clumps of trees by the bank, behind that a small meadow with haystacks, where the peasants' shackled horses hobble over the grass to the jangling of the bells tied round their necks. Beyond the ground rises, covered with maples or oaks or birches. Sometimes the slopes may be treeless, and the simple yet subtle moulding of the hollows in the hill face show brown with scorched grass where the marmots call to each other, or dark green with wild-strawberry plants; or, again, there may be a clump of trees on the summit only, the resting-place of the great bald-headed eagles called *behrkuts*. The forests, unless of birch, are oppressive in their dense

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luxuriance, and, above all, in their want of life. Only the *behrkuts* and astonishing numbers of hawks of different kinds sweep heavily over the trees. There are countless varieties of jewelled insects, but practically no small birds, and hence none of that atmosphere of constant twittering and hopping from bough to bough that animate the English woods with 'all the live murmur of a summer's day.' The features of southern Ural scenery that stamp themselves most strongly on the memory are not the hills themselves, but these illimitable silent forests and the lonely rivers.

In the agricultural villages in the Urals there are few obvious contrasts with peasant life in Central Russia. Here also are the long streets of wooden huts, the starling-posts, the wells with suspended poles, the courtyards with the brownish wattled fences. Generally speaking, the Ural peasants, however, are better off. Their soil is nearer a condition of virgin fertility. They have themselves more land, and in Bashkir districts can lease large areas on reasonable terms. Wood, too, is abundant and cheap. This comparatively secure position, and the fact that here, on the outskirts of the Muscovite empire, serfdom did not press so heavily on the life of the people, have

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A SUMMER'S DAY IN THE COUNTRY

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given them certain psychological characteristics of their own. They are probably the most practical, matter-of-fact, hard-headed part of the Russian race. Though not so sturdily independent as the northern peasantry, they are much more so than the central, and would be astonished at the servility common in rural England. This is especially true of the mining districts, where the people have been brought in touch with Jews, administrative exiles, and master workmen from towns or Western Europe. The Duma representatives from this country are exclusively Left. But the enlightenment in the mines and works is often but a half-education that produces violent prejudices, an intolerant class pride, and a coarseness of mind entirely foreign to the real peasant. The material prosperity, too, has inevitably affected rural simplicity, and morality is as little a strong point in such villages as temperance. There are many English managers throughout the Urals, and their general testimony agrees that in his duties the Russian workman is industrious, intelligent, and reliable.

In addition to the mines, there are several large industrial works in this country. One of these is the glassworks at Bohoyavlenski (the Place of

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the Appearance of God), situated on the River Usolka, which takes its name from a salt spring near the village. The medical properties of this spring are ascribed locally, not to the action of the salt, but to the special providence of Heaven indicated by the discovery of a holy *ikon* in the water. This was found by the priests of a neighbouring village, and is borne far and wide throughout the district, bringing large revenues to their church. Every autumn a great procession of peasants goes to the spring, taking their sick with them to drink of the sacred water and bathe in the river. My first stay here happened to coincide with this pilgrimage. The pilgrims on that occasion cut down the hay and the trees on the landowner's ground near the well, and when foresters were sent to prevent them, they thrashed these, saying: 'Can't we even worship God as we please?' The extensive red brick works with the great chimney and clouds of smoke lie by the river. Beyond rises a slight eminence, on which is a workmen's club. This contains a library and an excellent hall for concerts or dramatic performances, and from here in the evenings a gramophone blares the somewhat *risqué* words of a modern factory song. The bridge across the

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river is lit with electric light. On this side of it is the village proper, with a hospital, two schools —one a Zemstvo school for boys, the other for girls, financed, like the hospital, by the proprietors of the works—and the substantial houses with their green or red iron roofs, which have an air of comparative affluence. The Belgian glass-blowers who came here to instruct the first workmen were accompanied by their wives, and from these the peasant women acquired a taste for European dress. Hats, however, have not yet ousted the shawl. There are several picturesque spots in the village—the white church amid its green trees, the river-banks, the rising ground behind tho landowner's house, from which you see a long stretch of the Usolka Valley and the wooded hill ridges. Especially fine is the great artificial dam, which in its upper part is reedy and haunted by wild-duck. On the embankment, at its lower end by the works, are piled vast stacks of wood for use as fuel. When I was last here the sluices were being repaired, and the scaffoldings were full of workmen, who, as they strained together at ropes or logs, sang the chanty 'Yestchoa rasik' (Once more—a little once more).

All over Russia in the country the summer

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evenings are full of music and singing. In every village the *balalaika* and melodeon are played by peasant lads, who sit on benches outside the huts or stroll in threes and fours down the street, exchanging rustic compliments with similar groups of peasant girls. Elsewhere isolated choruses of male and female voices rise by the banks of pond or river. The women's notes are too shrill and nasal to be agreeable except from a distance, but nowhere else in the world are men's untrained voices so rich, powerful, and harmonious, as in Russia. Everyone knows about the organ-like depth and volume of the bass voices in the monastery choirs, but it is impossible to have an adequate idea of the country without imagining, together with all its poverty and greyness, these bands of soldiers singing at the front of marching regiments, the songs of the peasant women returning home from field work, the Volga chanties, the leader's solo and the answering chorus of workmen's *artels*, when bearded, red-shirted peasants haul at beams or at ships' ropes, and the sound of their deep voices vibrates in powerful waves through the sultry summer air.

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IV

THE VOLGA

Russian history is inextricably woven with its rivers. The Dnieppr, says M. Rambaud with perfect justice, brought it in contact with Byzantium, the Volga with Asia, and the Neva with Western Europe. But in the national life neither the Neva nor even 'Dnipro batko' of the Ukraine has played such a part as 'little mother Volga,' the great flood known to classical writers as the Rha, and to Armenians as the Tamar, whose Finnish name means 'Great Water.' Its basin formed almost exclusively the stage on which was played the history of the old sixteenth-century Russia, and as early as the eighth century a busy traffic went up and down its course between Central Asia and Eastern Europe right up to the Baltic.

The Volga traverses eight governments, and waters a country three times as great as France Its course of 3,458 versts makes it the longest as well as the largest river in Europe. It rises in

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the north-west district of the Government of Tver close on the Novgorod border, one of the most marshy districts in Western Russia. From the low wooded heights of the Valdai Hills you can see the upper valley of the Western Dvina, which falls into the Gulf of Riga, and a whole network of lakes and bogs. Through these the first feeble current of the Volga flows so sluggishly that its tributary the Jonkona sometimes forces it back into the long Lake Peno, from which it has just emerged. But a stream from a sister lake almost doubles its waters, and already it is navigable for small boats. It is only at Rjeff, however, once a stronghold of the Old Believers, that it takes to its breast a crowd of barges loaded with country produce. Soon after Rjeff it turns north-east. Passenger traffic begins at Tver, which lies on the railway between Petersburg and Moscow. An old seat of Northern Princes, it passed into the power of Moscow at the end of the fifteenth century. Ivan the Terrible made fearful havoc here when he passed on his way to subdue Novgorod. Now it is engrossed in commerce, especially in cotton and leather embroidery, the patterns of which may have been handed down by the Mongols. From the promenade on the

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Volga right bank the visitor receives an excellent idea of the growth of industry in modern Russia. He sees a perfect forest of masts ranging along the river-side, and his ears are deafened by the hooting of factory whistles. But beyond Tver the scenery down the river is almost entirely of a rural type. One passes a monastery or two, with their white walls standing out among the trees, some small uninteresting towns, and one, Yaroslavl, of extreme interest from its ancient history and picturesque appearance. But for the most part one sees only fields, forests, and peasant villages. The picture is steeped in a profoundly Russian atmosphere of breadth, greyness, and a certain melancholy. One is most conscious of this just before sunrise, when a faint streak of light hangs above the dark forest tops, and the early morning sounds float across the water from the village on the bank, and when there comes into one's mind the charming folk-verse:

> 'Over Holy Russia the cocks are crowing;
> Soon will the dawn be over Holy Russia.'

As one approaches Nijni Novgorod, the red earth wall on the right bank, in which are innumerable small deep holes where swallows nest, becomes appreciably higher than the left. The height varies

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from about fifty to a hundred feet. This feature, due to the rotation of the earth, is characteristic of all southern Russian rivers, and continues to be true of the Volga till the flat, lifeless steppes below Tsaritsin. Extraordinarily beautiful is the view of Nijni as one draws near it on a summer evening, with the green domes of the churches, the white houses half hid in trees mottling the steep slope, the grey walls of the Kreml creeping up the hill, and its towers silhouetted against the soft twilight sky, or when, later, one by one the stars shine forth in heaven and the town lights twinkle on the river, when the sonorous voices of boatmen, or *burlaks* send swelling over the dark current in slow chorus that most glorious and unforgettable of all the Volga songs: 'Down our little-mother Volga, On the broad stretch of water (*Rasigrálasya pogóda, Pogodúshka verkhováya, Verkhováya volnováya*). Nowhere in our own songs, not even in the Jacobite laments, does there throb just such a majestic note of heart-sickness; perhaps the nearest approach to it is in the refrain of the Highland emigrants in Canada:

'Listen to me as when ye heard our father
Sing long ago the song of other sho res;
Listen to me, and then in chorus gather
All your deep voices as ye pull your oars.'

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RAFTS ON THE VOLGA

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Before the introduction of steam, the numbers of the *burlaks*, peasants who tow the Volga boats, amounted to three hundred thousand. The work was lightly paid and extremely heavy, and laid a severe strain on eyes, legs, and lungs. The journey from Astrakhan to Nijni took only seventy days, and many hard experiences went to fashion their saying, 'Now the Volga's a mother, now a step-mother,' curiously reminiscent of a famous phrase of Æschylus.

At Nijni one changes into larger and in every way more comfortable boats for the voyage to Astrakhan. The scenery itself is perhaps scarcely so pleasing as above the confluence of the Oka, or it may be that by this time one feels its monotonous sameness. Save that the river is broader, its main features remain unchanged. As before, the right bank is high, the left flat, and the background shut in with forests; as before, there are villages and churches, and windmills waving their great arms. The population, however, on the banks is no longer purely Russian. In Kazan, indeed, the Russians number only forty-one per cent. of the inhabitants. We are now in the country of Finnish or Mongolian tribes, and representatives of these, veiled Tartar ladies, swarthy pedlars, or Lapp-like peasants, add a

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touch of colour to the Russian tourists and merchants, and the landowners with their families returning from Petersburg to their country estates. From Nijni to Kazan the river flows generally in an easterly direction, from Kazan to Tsaritsin in a south-westerly direction, but much more south than west, and from Tsaritsin to Astrakhan it runs south-east.

Kazan, which lies three hundred and eighty versts below Nijni, on several hills on the left bank of the Kazanka, was the capital of a Tartar empire that arose after the dissolution of the Golden Horde. It was stormed by Ivan the Terrible on October 2, 1552, after an obstinate resistance. Sentimental historians love to record how the carnage within its walls drew tears from the eyes of the pitiless Tsar himself, who said: 'They are not Christians, but yet they are men.' During his stay he began the work of surrounding the old wooden Kreml, built in the fifteenth century by Qulau-Mahmet-Khan, with a stone wall fortified by towers. The bulk of these were destroyed by Pugatchoff's Cossacks in the rising of 1774, and, to judge by the three which remain to-day, their loss is not a profound calamity. Only one building survives from ante-Russian

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GETTING CAVIARE AT ASTRAKHAN

times, the tower of Souioumbeka, from which a Tartar Princess of this name flung herself to escape, like another Cleopatra, gracing the conqueror's triumph. It is said to be held in veneration by the Tartars. From the top of its seven stories, more than two hundred feet high, is a remarkable view,—especially in spring, when the Volga and Kazanka flood an enormous expanse of country,—of the bulbous Christian cupolas and substantial Russian houses in the centre of the town, and its Mohammedan suburbs with their tapering minarets. Situated at the meeting-place of the Siberian, Caspian, and Baltic trade routes, Kazan would seem to be particularly favoured for commercial activity. It suffers, however, from one overwhelming disadvantage, for the Volga gradually recedes westward pursued by the suburbs, and the town proper is now left behind three miles from the bank. The University is important chiefly for the instruction given in Oriental languages. The museum contains interesting antiquities from the ruins of Bulgary discovered in the time of Peter the Great.

These lie a hundred versts down the river. The Bulgars were a Finno-Turkish people whose origin is unknown, but who probably settled on the Volga about the beginning of our era. Their

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empire was overthrown by the Mongols, passed under the Khans of the Golden Horde, and was destroyed afresh when Timurlain flung his masses of men across Eastern Russia. It was possibly then that the Bulgarians started on the journey which was eventually to preserve, if not perpetuate, their name in Southern Europe. The ruins lie near the modern village, which was built of part of their stones.

The mighty River Kama, which joins the Volga below Kazan, is the southern boundary of a wild territory known as 'the land of woods.' Between it, indeed, and the River Unsha, which flows into the Volga above Nijni, most of the country is still covered with dense forests. These formed an admirable refuge for sectarians fleeing from persecution. Up to the present day there linger here the beliefs and customs so sympathetically portrayed by Melnikoff in his 'In the Forests' and 'In the Hills.' There are hermitages and villages in the Vetluga basin full of the most valuable ethnographical records. The source of the Kama lies in marshy country to the east of Viatka. It first describes a circuitous course to the north, and then flows south past Perm. Traversing the Governments of Perm, Ufa, Viatka, and Kazan, a basin at least as

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great as France, it is by far the principal tributary of the Volga, and in May the meeting of the two rivers is like a boundless sea. Just as the Oka seemed the larger stream at Nijni, so here, too, the Kama appears the true river, and the Volga only its feeder. Its course, rather than that of the other, is followed by the joint stream, and for a long way its clear, bright waters flow distinct from the muddy, turbid waves of the Volga.

Below Kazan the yellow cornfields on the banks give place to dark forests of oaks, pines, and firs, and the bosom of the river is studded with small picturesque wooded islands. By common consent, the finest bit of scenery in the whole journey is that which refreshes the eye after passing the town of Simbirsk, and before the ship drops anchor by the Samara wharves. Here the left bank is hilly, and the right rises into cragged wooded heights with fantastic outlines known in order as the Jegonlevski, Gretchonlevski, and Mordvashanski Hills. Through them the Volga vainly seeks a passage, and is forced eastwards. Oak and lime trees cover the steep slopes, which are rent by deep sinister gorges and ravines. These, tradition says, were the refuge of the Volga brigands, and their shadow lies so dark on the water that the fanciful tourist may easily

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conjure up a picture of the black craft moored to the sandy shore, and the buccaneers sprawling round enormous fires. In his story 'Visions,' Turguenieff has given in a few bold, sweeping colours a fine description of these pirates and their most famous and formidable leader, the Don Cossack Stenka Razine, who for three years terrorized the Lower Volga and the Caspian. The sketch tells of a man whom an unearthly lover bears wherever he pleases, to distant countries or into the distant past. On this occasion they stand by the Volga at night, and, though he sees nothing save the dark water, he is conscious suddenly of the 'noise of screams and cries, furious cursing and laughter, the laughter worst of all, the strokes of oars and blows of axes, slamming as of doors and sea-chests, the scrape of digging and wheels, the neighing of horses, the sound of alarums, the clang of chains, drunken songs and the grinding of teeth, unconsolable weeping, pitiful despairing silence, exclamations of command, death-rattles and bravado whistling.' With masterly art Turguenieff pictures the approach of Stenka Razine. The man still sees nothing, but feels all at once as if an enormous body were moving straight towards him. 'Stepan Timofeyitch,' the corsairs shout, 'here comes Stepan Timofeyitch,

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BLESSING THE WATER IN THE COUNTRY

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our little father, our ataman, our feeder'; and then a terrible voice booms a death-sentence to their prisoners: 'Frolka' — this was his brother and lieutenant—'where are you, dog? Kindle up on all sides! Take the axes to the cursed white-hands!' The man feels the heat of flames, the biting smoke, and at the same moment something warm like blood splashes on his hands and face. The brigands burst into inhuman guffaws, and he faints away. Right up to the nineteenth century, the mouth of the Usa, which breaks through the hills here, was a nest of pirates. Here from an outlook on the cliffs they kept a watch for merchant vessels, and as soon as one was spied the banks re-echoed with the ominous rallying-cry, '*Savin na kitchku!*' Captain, crew, and *burlaks*, fell on their faces, and the freebooters took what they pleased.

At length, at the narrow Samara Gates, the river breaks impatiently through its barrier, and turns first sharply south, and then as sharply westward. Samara, like Simbrisk and Sysran, was founded to guard the Russian frontier against the Kalmucks, the Bashkirs, and the Crimean Tartars. From here in the first half of the eighteenth century a line of fortresses was built to Orenburg, and under their protection into the Bashkir country swept that wave

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of Russian colonists which Aksakoff in a famous work half genuinely deplores. The river here is bordered by woods and high chalk cliffs, and for thirty-five versts below Samara the Serpent Hills stretch in gentle slopes above the right bank. At Saratoff, the largest town on the Volga, the river is two miles broad and already at sea-level. The volume of water is probably as great here as at its mouth, for in its lower course there are few tributaries, little rain, and continual evaporation. On the left bank is a whole succession of flourishing German colonies, where the descendants of the settlers placed here by Catharine the Great are still distinguished from their Russian neighbours by religion, dress, language, cleanliness, and prosperity. Saratoff—a Tartar name meaning 'yellow hill'—has a new University, but otherwise the place is uninteresting.

Much less dull are the streets of Tsaritsin, with their motley crowd of Tartars, Kalmucks, Cossacks from the Don and Kirghi z, with long flowing *chapans*, fastened with silk or leathern girdles, and round, pointed white felt hats. This town has been connected by popular etymology with the death of a King's daughter, but the word means properly 'yellow water.' With its extremely

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A CARPET FAIR AT ASTRAKHAN

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favourable position for commerce, at the point of junction with the Don, it has grown with American rapidity, and is one of the busiest and most thriving of the Volga towns. Some way to the east lies the district town of Tsareff, in the neighbourhood of which was Sarai, the capital of the Khan of the Golden Horde. It was here that the Russian Princes paid obeisance to the Tartars. After Tsaritsin the appearance of the Volga changes.

> 'Then sands begin
> To hem his watery course, and dam his streams,
> And split his currents.'

But this archipelago of small islands is at length passed, and once more its giant flood, which in spring has no end to it, stretches itself out in unbroken expanse on either hand. The right bank is no longer hilly, and from midstream it is often difficult to say where the water ends and the land begins. Now and again a tug pulls long caravans of barges upstream from Astrakhan, and white or brown-sailed fishing-boats make for tree-sheltered villages on the banks; but save for these and the swallows skimming low over the surface there is nothing to relieve the desolation, nothing to confine the illimitable spaces of river, steppe, and

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sky. Unimaginable is the play of light at sunrise and sunset on that majestic sheet of water, with its broad, ever-changing streaks of gold, orange, lilac, mauve, and blue. The great steppes are the dried-up bed of an ancient sea, of which the Caspian is a remainder. They end abruptly on the Caspian, which is itself gradually shrinking, and when strong north winds blow the sea is driven far back. They are mostly unsuitable for agriculture, and are given up to Kirghiz and Kalmuck nomads, who wander over them with their black *kibitkas*, rearing cattle.

This latter people appeared first in Europe in 1630, under the leadership of their Khan Ho-Yurluk, and soon moved west of the Caspian. They vowed 'perpetual subservience' to the Muscovite Tsar, but in practice this relation was purely fictitious, and their predatory bands swept as far north as Penza and Tamboff. Wearying at last of the constant conflict with Russian forces, the whole nation in 1771 set back for the slopes of the Altai. De Quincey has drawn a powerful picture of their flight, and of what befell those settled west of the Volga who came to the river after the ice had broken. The nearness of the East is suggested in their felt tents which dot the steppe,

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their pagodas, the hum of praying-wheels, and the eternal Buddhist formula, which half Asia repeats countless times a day, 'Om Maneh Padmeh Hum!' (O Jewel of the Lotus Flower!) They are of middle stature and squat figure. They have large heads, black straight hair, thin beards, slits of eyes, and a darkish yellow complexion. Naturally kindly, straightforward, and honest, they have become towards strangers secretive, cunning, and vindictive; when in a position of power they are tyrannical, when powerless abjectly servile. They love drink, cards, and idleness, and everyone, above all the women, smokes heavily. They wear the loose Caucasian *beshmets*, of one piece, with a roomy cut-out breast. The fashion of their four-cornered hats has been followed by Russian coachmen. Though in the steppe there are a few *khotons*, or groups of huts, and near Astrakhan some villages clustering round a *khurul*, or temple, they are still mostly nomad. The early attempts at making them adopt a settled mode of life merely led to the introduction of Russian colonies. Thus, in 1846, to settle the roads between Astrakhan and Stavropol, forty-four stations, each with fifty Russian and fifty Kalmuck 'courts,' were laid out in the steppe. The Kalmucks were offered eighty acres of land

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apiece, the buildings and fifteen roubles, but not a single one agreed to settle; whereupon the empty homesteads were occupied by fresh Russian peasants. Only their princes and lamas are burnt after the Indian custom. The common dead are wrapped in a piece of old felt and thrown into disused wells or deep holes, or in winter simply into a snow-drift.

Astrakhan from ancient times was a settlement of Asiatic hordes. From the third century of our era it formed the capital of the powerful Khasar Empire that stretched over nearly all South Russia. The old town lay some eight miles farther to the north than the present city, which was founded in the fourteenth century, and which, till its capture by the Russians in 1556, was the seat of a Tartar Khanate. Thanks to its position for trade with the Caucasus, Persia, and Eastern Russia, Astrakhan has developed into a flourishing port, second only in the south littoral to Odessa. The chief industry is connected with the catching and curing of fish, and for this purpose every spring there pours into the town an army of Kalmucks, Persians, Kirghiz, and peasants from the neighbouring villages.

The Volga delta begins about thirty miles above Astrakhan. The number of the various channels

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amounts to more than eighty. They are exposed to constant changes, and especially to the change caused by the rotation of the earth. Thus the main channel, which in the sixteenth century was the most easterly, and in the reign of Peter about midway, is now the Baktemir, the most westerly. These streams, with their branches, flow through an archipelago of islands of various shapes and sizes, along which stretch dismal dunes of clay and sand about thirty feet high, either destitute of vegetation or covered here and there with rank steppe-grasses. A few fishing settlements are scattered along their banks. Thus 'shorn and parcelled,' winding between 'beds of sand and matted rushy isles,' the Volga at length quietly and imperceptibly—for no definite border-line may be marked—pours its waters into the Caspian Sea.

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V

AN EASTERN GOVERNMENT

THERE are few districts in Russia, 'the land of forty races,' where there have not lived alongside with the Russian peasants peoples who differed from them in customs, language, physical type, and religion. West of the Volga the people were mostly of Finnish stock, and have largely died out, or migrated, or been absorbed into the great Russian race. The third process was facilitated by their conversion to Christianity. The word 'pravoslavniy,' or 'orthodox,' is almost equivalent to the word 'Russian.' Thus whole villages of purely Finnish peoples have gradually shed their old tongue, customs, and pagan faith, and adopted those of the Russians. But even where intermarriage has blended the two stocks nearly, it is not difficult to detect physical and social characteristics due to Finnish influence. The actual process of absorption can still be seen. While staying in the Government of Tamboff in the summer of

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1908, I saw a group of women thinning vegetables in a garden, whose Lapp-like features and curiously white costumes were entirely non-Slavonic. A tall, lean Russian peasant with a hatchet-shaped face stood by superintending, and as we approached he kept urging the women, 'Work! work!' They spoke a broken Russian, but had forgotten their own tongue. These people were Mestcheraki, but call themselves Russians. The Tartars alone call them by their proper name, while the Russian peasant calls them Tchuvash and the Tchuvash call them Tartars.

East of the Volga fusion has not taken place on so extensive a scale. With regard to the Finnish non-Mohammedan tribes, the Russian settlements have been formed here only comparatively recently, and in the case of the more numerous Mohammedan peoples Islamism has proved an insurmountable obstacle. Thus the various racial peculiarities are still well preserved. Over great tracts of country, especially in the hills, only one people may be found; while in others, within the radius of a few miles, there is a perfect ethnological museum.

First among the non-Slavonic peoples for industry, prosperity, and education, must be placed the Tartars, who appeared in Russia in 1240, and

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whose dominion so profoundly influenced the course of Russian history. Politically now they are of no moment, but they still leave the impression of a fine virile race. In the Caucasian districts and round the Caspian they show an open preference for Turkey, whither many of the Crimean horde emigrated after the annexation of the peninsula. But in Russia proper they are perfectly content. The Russians have been careful never by over-zealous missionary activity to fan the slumbering flames of fanaticism. Indeed, the student of Russian ecclesiastical history must note a remarkable contrast between the treatment of the Tsar's non-Slavonic subjects and the measures adopted towards dissent from the Orthodox Church. In appearance the Tartar is broad-shouldered, with oval face, projecting skull-bones, narrow, black, expressive, eyes, and a thin wedge-shaped beard. The women run to flesh, and spoil their complexions by over-application of paint and rouge. Though their villages are strikingly superior to the Russian, they are not good agriculturists. Scarcely a year passes but they apply for help to the local Zemstvo, confident that 'the Russian Tsar is rich, he will feed us.' But in other than rural pursuits they show a high degree of industry, perseverance,

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RICH TARTARS

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and practical ability. These qualities are reinforced by the sobriety which makes them invaluable as coachmen or waiters. They recruit largely the ranks of the lower servants in the Imperial household and great caravanserais of Petersburg and Moscow. Nearer the railways many of them tour the country as pedlars, with *khalats* and cloth goods flung over their arm. They are well educated. A school is attached to nearly every *metchet*, and the mullahs and their assistants teach the boys while their wives instruct the girls. The children stay at school from the age of seven to twelve. The educational course is chiefly religious. Higher instruction is provided in a great Mohammedan college at Ufa, the town magnificently situated above the River Bielaya, and to complete their training the future mullahs go to Bukhara or some other city in Central Asia, or even to Egypt. The mullahs stand on a very different footing in respect to influence and authority than the Christian *pop* in Russian villages. In the Duma elections, as they direct, their people vote to a man, and this discipline almost invariably secures the return of the Mohammedan candidate, even against numerical odds. Comparatively few Tartars are polygamous. Their women for the most part are kept in rigid

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seclusion, and only in the very poorest families do they work in the fields.

In this respect they differ from their interesting co-religionists, the Bashkirs, whose women do more than their share of outdoor labour, and are not particularly observant of the rules that enjoin veiling. The precise meaning of the word Bashkir is uncertain; it may be 'dirty head,' or perhaps 'red head' in allusion to the not uncommon reddish hair, which among Russians is rare. Of mixed Finnish and Mongolian blood, they are probably the earliest inhabitants of great tracts in south-eastern Russia. In appearance they are a good-looking, finely-proportioned race, especially the younger woman, whose delicately moulded oval faces and slender figures contrast with the grosser charms of the Tartar beauties. When the Ural Cossacks saw the Maygars in the Hungarian campaign of 1849, they cried out 'Bashkiri!' The man's head is shaved from early childhood, and he never takes off the scull cap, which in summer is covered by a white felt wideawake, and in winter by a thick hat. Their dress is a long white shirt of coarse linen open at the front—whereas the Russian shirt is divided at the side of the neck—and ungirdled, with a pair of trousers

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tucked into cloth puttees. Over the shirt the humble Bashkir wears a sleeveless coat, and the mullahs and rich men a coat with sleeves whose length is proportionate to the wearer's dignity While the common people wear *lapti*, their betters have heel-less top-boots of white felt or fine leather, profusely decorated with coloured silk. The Bashkir woman is clad in bright-coloured shirt and trousers, and loves to deck herself with beads and trinketry. Some of the old filigree work, the secret of which they have lost, was remarkably beautiful. They are good-tempered, friendly, hospitable, and lazy, a race of hand-to-mouth fatalists. The Bashkir himself does nothing beyond a little sowing or haymaking, and his favourite occupations when possible are finding and robbing wild-bees' nests, hunting, and fishing. But changed conditions have sadly affected the old *dolce far niente* existence. In the hills, indeed, where they roam over enormous districts breeding horses, the easy, patriarchal life is still more or less maintained. In the plains, where their land is more curtailed and yet offers the only means for subsistence, they are perforce placed in the transitional stage between nomad and settled life. Even here in summer they generally

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migrate to a second village in wilder country, or, at the least, on their own land set up rough bush shelters. In prosperous districts these summer quarters behind the village huts are white tents of thin felt, furnished with pillows and carpets. To their new conditions the Bashkirs have not adapted themselves. They are miserable farmers. In their wretched villages and tumble-down hovels they are dying out fast. Only in summer does life flow easily, with abundance of horse-flesh and *kroot*, which are flat cakes made of cow's milk, and *koumiss*, which is fermented mare's milk, not boiled, but set for hours in a place moderately exposed to the sun. Only then do the notes of the flute-like *tchebizga* ring out high and clear among the woods, and the Bashkirs sing their monotonous songs.

Among the Tartar group is often included the Tchuvash race, chiefly on linguistic grounds, which are notoriously unreliable, but it seems probable that this people has just as many Finnish affinities as Tartar. Their appearance and costumes, the prevailing colour of which is blue for men and red for women, point to northern origin. Through the influence of the schools they are becoming rapidly Russianized and Christian. St. Nicholas the Wonder-Worker, however, they consider

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more important than Christ, and many of them still carry in the bosom of their dress little roughly-hewn deities of wood, on whom they visit punishment in times of agricultural depression. Their pagan religion was dualistic. Tora was the good spirit, and Shaitan the bad; but there were also a number of subsidiary beings, either good, such as light, or bad, such as famine. The women's costumes and head-dresses are covered with coins and brass soldier-buttons, and their legs are swathed in such thick coverings that they look like pillars, for they consider it immodest that these should be seen, and that to go barefooted, as the Russian women do, exceeds all bounds of propriety and shame. The Tchuvash are quiet, industrious agriculturists, but also great drunkards and horse-stealers. They are of small stature and feeble physique, with a heavy trailing walk, a pale face, and apathetic look. Something is wrong with their eyes, as with those of the Tcheremisses. Both peoples are decreasing in numbers. The Tcheremiss religion is a mixture of Orthodoxy, Mohammedanism, and Shamanism. Fire dances and sacrifices of white horses continue up to the present day. Their divorce custom is at once simple and dramatic. The couple lie down back

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to back bound tightly by a strong cord. Then the village elder draws his knife and cuts the knot, and the two are free to set off in opposite directions. The women's red garments with breast-plate of silver coins, beads, and corals, and the high-pointed hat which falls behind like a hood and is stiffened with ornaments, are even more picturesque than those of the Tchuvash. But first of all in its elegant simplicity is the dress of the Mordva girl—white puttees, trousers, and jacket with a border of blue. This white garb, with the black footgear, has given rise to a Russian pleasantry that greets and irritates the maid whenever she steps abroad: 'Whither, swan, swimmest thou?'

The Mordva played an important part in early Russian history. They occupied all the middle basin of the Volga, from the Urals to the source of the Oka, and more than once assaulted the Nijni fortress which was built to check their raids. They are a fine people to look upon, massively built, with fair hair and complexion, and grey eyes. They are excellent farmers, and are increasing in numbers. The Russian peasantry in backward districts say: 'The Mordva know how to pray better than we; their gods fulfil their prayers better.' They are already, to a great

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extent, Russianized, but retain many traces of their pagan religion, especially with regard to ancestor worship. In the beginning of the nineteenth century a Mordva dreamer tried to restore this old faith. 'After you turn again,' he said, 'the whole world will adopt the laws, manners, and dresses, of the Mordva, and in everything will follow Mordva customs, and the Mordva will be free, will not belong to landowners nor pay rent, but will be the first people on the earth.' But this very appeal to the old religion bears indications of the influence of the new. Among them women occupy a comparatively high position. There is very free sexual connection before marriage, but divorce is almost unknown. 'Marriage,' says one of their own proverbs, 'is a bond.' In all questions the husband consults the wife. 'The husband speaks,' another of their sayings declares, 'the wife thinks.' They have some interesting aphorisms illustrative of ideal matrimonial relations, such as: 'With your neighbour deal in roubles, with your wife in caresses;' or again, 'Where love can't, the cudgel can't;' and there is quite an advanced one about the bringing up of children: 'Train a dog with a stick, a child with love.'

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With all these various peoples the Russian peasants are on the friendliest terms. The epithet 'Asiatic,' which the angry Russian hurls at the head of his fellow, amid a host of others, such as 'cholera,' 'Anti-Christ,' 'Herod,' or 'Mazeppa,' does imply a certain colour pride, but this amounts to very little. It is an exaggeration to say that Russia is half Asiatic. But she is a vast outlying province of Europe, more in touch with and understanding more of Asia than any other western country. The Russians fraternize with Orientals to a degree intolerable for the arrogance of colour and haughty instincts of the English. On the other hand, they have not our energy and tireless enthusiasm for thrusting reforms on uncivilized races. Hence it comes about that, as an observant English traveller has remarked: 'English administration does a great deal for the native in Asia in a singularly unsympathetic manner, while the Russian does much less, but in a manner the native understands and appreciates.' In the history of European dealings with the East, for which many thoughtful minds believe that Europe will eventually have to pay a heavy retribution, few pages stand out so unsullied by prejudice and cruelty as the Russian annexation and government

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STAGE FOR POST-HORSES IN THE URALS

of Central Asia. In the Far East the stains on the Russian record are largely the direct result of sending to these distant provinces where control over representatives was impossible the most worthless civil officials and the scum of the army. It is of profound importance that the two great European powers in Asia should be in sympathy, as far, at least, as concerns Asiatic affairs. There is a statesmanlike passage in Vladimir Solovioff's 'Three Conversations'—the last work that great thinker published—which is full of interest in this connection. 'If in Turkey,' he writes, 'we are for the moment powerless, we can already play a first-class rôle as civilizers in Central Asia, and especially in the Far East, whither it appears history is shifting its centre of gravity. By geographical position, and for other reasons, Russia can do in Central Asia and the Far East more than all other nations, with the exception, of course, of England. Hence the problem of our policy in this direction is a lasting, genuine understanding with England, so that our common work as civilizers may never be perverted into senseless hostility and unworthy rivalry.'

In these Eastern governments in the hot and lazy atmosphere of summer, it is often difficult to

believe that one is in Europe. The mullah's voice intoning solemnly, 'La illaha el Allah,' the Bashkir in his long *khalat* on horseback, the Kerghiz caravan with a string of camels, their greeting, 'Salaam Aleikum,' that bears a meaning over half Asia—all these things suggest the regions north of Tibet. Life is full of the sounds, the colours, the smells of the East. The scenery also is not European, but precisely such as is familiar to English readers through the photographs of Sven Hedin. Over the conical grassy hills, the infinite billowy plains, the pine-fringed blue lakes, the great marshes with their flocks of wild duck, geese, cranes, and swans, there broods a spirit of wildness and luxuriance which gradually comes to exercise over one a vague but irresistible charm. Especially refreshing is this unstinted, unspoiled wealth after one comes from the monotonous colours of Central Russia, and nowhere is it felt more strongly than on the banks of the rivers such as the Kama, the Ufa, or the Bielaya. These have nothing of the perpetual sameness that marks the sedge-bordered lesser streams that sluggishly drive their lifeless waters through the tilled lands westward. They themselves are full of interest; here narrow, swirling, and impetuous, like a mill race; there lying asleep

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in warm willow-shaded reaches; there, again, broken by cascades or stretching out in broad, shallow rapids, in which are set the basket-shaped wattled fish-traps of the Bashkirs. On the banks the scenery unfolds itself in constantly changing but ever-fascinating pictures of maple thickets, clay huts, or wide levels of grassy plain or sand. Now the hills overhang the current; now, after a bend of the river, they recede to the greyish-purple distance. It was my good fortune to spend two long happy summers on the banks of the Bielaya, and little vignettes come crowding into the memory, a Mordva boy lashing furiously at a yellow, wriggling snake, night-fishing with braziers in drifting boats and the hiss of burning sparks on the water, a procession of Tchuvash women on a dusty road with an *ikon*, long shaky Bashkir bridges with wattled huts, hunting camps in lonely places under whispering birches.

In the rich primeval freshness of this country are steeped the immortal pages of Aksakoff's 'Family Chronicle.' He deplores that much of its former unspoilt, unsullied loveliness is lost, disfigured by the Russian plough and axe; 'but still,' he says, 'even now, glorious country, you are beautiful! Clear and transparent, like enormous

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deep bowls, are your lakes. Full of water, full of all kinds of fish, are your rivers that now rush swiftly through dells and gorges among the foot-hills of the Urals, and now quietly and brightly, like amethysts strung on a thread, glide with imperceptible movement over your grassy steppes. In your hurrying hill-streams, clear and cold as ice in sultry summer heat, that run under the shadow of trees and bushes, live all manner of trout pleasant to the taste, and beautiful to the eye, but soon disappearing when man begins to touch with unclean hands the virgin currents of their cool, transparent haunts. Wonderful is the verdure that beautifies your rich black earth, luxuriant fields, and meadows. In spring they shine white with the milky blossom of strawberry plants, and cherry and wild peach trees, and in summer they are covered as with a red carpet with fragrant strawberries and tiny cherries, that later in autumn ripen and turn purple. With abundant crops is rewarded the lazy, rude toil that but here and there, and but somehow or other, turns up your fertile soil with clumsy, primitive plough. Fresh, green, and vigorous, stand your darkling forests, and swarms of wild bees populate your natural hives, storing them full of sweet-smelling lime-tree

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honey. And the Ufa marten—prized above all others—not yet has he migrated from the wooded upper waters of the Ufa and the Bielaya! Peaceful and quiet are your patriarchal, primitive inhabitants and owners—the nomad Bashkir tribes. Fewer now, but still great and numerous, are their droves of horses, their herds of cattle, and flocks of sheep. Now, as in bygone years after the cruel stormy winter, the Bashkirs, lean and emaciated as winter flies, with the first spring warmth, with the first pasture grass, drive out to the wilds their droves and flocks half dead with starvation, and drag themselves after them with their wives and children.... And in two or three weeks you will not know a single one! Instead of skeleton horses are seen spirited untiring chargers, and now the steppe stallion proudly and jealously guards the pasture-ground of his mares, allowing neither beast nor man approach. The thin winter herd of cattle has become fat, and their dugs and udders are full of nourishing juice. But what cares the Bashkir for fragrant cow's milk? By now the life-giving koumiss is ready, fermented in bags of horse hide, and that blessed draught of heroes, all that can drink, from the babe at the breast to the tottering old men, drink till they are drunk, and in a marvel-

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lous fashion disappear all the hardships of winter, and even of old age. The thin faces become round and full; the pale, drawn cheeks are covered with the flush of health. . . . But what a terrible and melancholy appearance have the deserted settlements! Sometimes a passing traveller who has never seen aught of the kind will light upon them and be astonished at the picture of desolation, as if the whole place were dead. The windows of the scattered huts, with the white frames gaping, and the bladder-skin panes taken away, look at him wildly and mournfully, like human faces with gouged out eyes. . . . Here and there howls a dog left on a chain to guard the houses, at long intervals visited and fed by his master; here and there wails a half-wild cat, foraging for unprovided food—and save for them no living thing, not a single human soul. . . .'

VI

PROVINCIAL TOWNS

In A.D. 862, in answer to the Slav appeal, 'Our land is great and fruitful, but order and justice in it there are none: come and take possession and rule over us,' the three brothers Rurik, Sinéous, and Truvor, princes of the Variags, whoever they were, left their country, wherever that was, and entered Russia. Twenty years later, Rurik's son made his residence at Kieff, on the Dnieppr, and from this base the immigrants, who soon became merged with the Slavs, protected all the commerce that passed up and down the Austrvegr or Eastern way of the Sagas. Kieff had been founded some time before by a Slavonic tribe. By its position it was marked out for a great future. It lay at the meeting-point of the zones of forest, black earth, and steppe, and in the neighbourhood the Dnieppr is joined by its most important upper tributaries. It early became populous and prosperous, and was the first capital of Russia. The historian

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Kliuchevski affirms that 'the common people still remember and know Old Kieff, with its princes and heroes, with its St. Sophia and Pechersk Monastery, unfeignedly love and revere it, as they have neither loved nor revered any of the capitals that succeeded it, Vladimir-on-Kliazma, Moscow, or Petersburg. About Vladimir they have forgotten, and, indeed, knew it but little in its own day. Moscow pressed heavily on the people. They respected her a little and feared her a little, but did not love her sincerely. Petersburg they neither love, nor respect, nor even fear.'

It was at Kieff in the tenth century that Prince Vladimir, after his marriage with Anne, the sister of the Greek Emperor, converted all the people to Christianity by a wholesale baptism, and by declaring all recalcitrants enemies of Jesus Christ and the Grand Duke. Already in the twelfth century it boasted four hundred churches, several of which had gilded cupolas. But it was stormed and sacked by Russian forces in 1169, by nomad hordes in 1203, and by the Tartars under Batu Khan in 1240. Shortly afterwards Plano Kirpin, a Papal emissary to the Khan's Court, passed through Kieff on his way from Poland. 'When we entered Russian soil,' he says, 'we saw a count-

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SUMMER CARAVANS

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less number of human skulls and bones on the steppe. Before, Kieff was very great and populous, but now there are scarcely two hundred houses in it.' When the Lithuanians drove off the Tartars, the liberty of the town was not restored. In the fifteenth century Casimir of Poland forbade the construction of Russian churches in what was the holy Mother City of all the towns in Russia. Only in 1686 was it incorporated in the Muscovite empire.

It is now the seventh city in the Tsar's dominions, and a fortress of first rank. From two to three miles broad, it stretches for ten miles along the Dnieppr on the high right bank, which in several places is broken up by wide, deep ravines. So spacious are its boundaries that within them it could contain at least three times its present population. It is composed of four distinct parts. Podol, the business quarter, lies to the north-east, on low ground by the river. On rising ground to the south-west is Lipti, 'the place of lime-trees,' a delightful residential suburb with white-walled, green-roofed villas and shady gardens. North of Lipti is Old Kieff, the centre of the town, with elegant streets and handsome public buildings. Here are the theatre, the

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University, the Museum with a fine collection of Scythian work, and the ruins of the Golden Gate, which was in ancient times the principal entrance. Here, too, is the St. Sophia Cathedral, the most interesting building in Kieff. It was erected at the beginning of the eleventh century in memory of a victory won over the nomad Petchenégues, but its real construction has been disguised externally by later additions. It is of quadrangular shape, with fifteen golden domes. In the inside the walls are covered with mosaics on a gold background, and old frescoes which call up memories of St. Mark's at Venice. More interesting, however, are the frescoes that adorn the walls of the great stair, which was once outside the building and led to the Grand Duke's castle, but now mounts a tower to the gallery. These represent with a curious combination of subtlety and primitive simplicity mythical animals, hunting scenes, and people dressed in rich Byzantine costumes.

The fourth quarter lies to the south-east, and is called Petchersk, or the town of the grottoes. These are low, narrow galleries hollowed in the clay soil, with little square places that have served as monastic cells. Some of them have been used

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as chapels. In the niches at the sides rest carefully swathed bodies of saints. It is interesting to go round these tombs with a peasant crowd escorted by a monk, and note the degree of reverence and amount of kopecks paid to each holy man. Perhaps the most favoured is John the Much Suffering, who lived, so the monk says, for thirty years buried up to his neck. He has been left in this uncomfortable position and his mitre-covered head alone protrudes above the earth. This is the most ancient and most venerated monastery in Russia. Nearly two hundred thousand pilgrims visit it every year, and its revenues exceed a million roubles. Immediately opposite the Holy Gate which leads into the great courtyard is the military arsenal. From the hill on which these buildings lie a long stair leads down to the river, and as one descends there is a splendid view of the yellow waters of the Dnieppr, spanned by a suspension bridge, and the plains beyond. But perhaps the best view-point is at the northern end of the wooded terrace near the bronze statue of St. Vladimir, the cross of which is illuminated at night by electricity and seen from immense distances over the steppe. From here a large part of the town is visible. Of recent years Kieff has attracted

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less pious, if wealthier, visitors than the peasant pilgrims, by a hardly justified notoriety as a centre of pleasure and refined vice. Less ambitious grounds for comparison with Paris might be adduced from the fact that Kieff, too, echoes with country sounds in the early morning, when the market-places, especially the Bessarabka, are full of brightly clad little Russian peasants selling country produce.

Set also on a river's hilly right bank is the town proper of Nijni Novgorod, at the confluence of the Oka with the Volga. It must be distinguished from the older and once mighty republic in the marshes—Lord Novgorod the Great—the power of which was indicated in the popular saying, 'Who can stand against God and Novgorod?' Nijni was founded in 1212 to oppose the aggressions of the Mordva and the Bulgars. About 1250 it won independence under its own princes, and was strongly fortified, but before the century was out not only were its walls and towers stormed, the city burned, and the inhabitants enslaved by Tartars, but it fell also under the suzerainty of Moscow. In later years it repelled attacks from Mordvas, from Cossacks, and from Stenka Razine's formidable buccaneers. But the most glorious

chapter in its annals is the part its citizens played in restoring national stability after 'the time of troubles' in the seventeenth century. Novgorod the Great was held by Swedes, Moscow Kremlin by Poles; both Tsar and Patriarch were prisoners, and the national leaders among the aristocracy were bought by foreign gold. Pirates and brigands pillaged town and country, sparing not even the churches; in more than one district famine drove the miserable people to cannibalism. Then the country was saved by a whole national movement shared in by gentry, clergy, and, not least, the peasants, and directed from Nijni. The monks of the Troitsa Monastery sent letters to the various towns still independent, and when these were read at Nijni, a butcher, Kouzma Minine, stepped forward and said: 'If we wish to save the Empire of Moscow, we must spare neither our lands nor goods; let us sell our houses and put in service our wives and children; let us look for a man who is willing to fight for the Orthodox Faith, and to march at our head.' Minine sought out Prince Pojharski and 'beat the ground with his forehead' before him, asking him to take command. The religious note of the expedition was emphasized by a three days' fast, which was ordained even for children at the breast.

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Then Pojharski and Minine set out on their triumphant march to Moscow. Another famous deed was wrought at this time by a peasant, Ivan Soussanin. When Michael Romanoff was appointed Tsar, the Poles sent armed men to seize him, but these Soussanin led astray in the woods, and they killed him. His service is commemorated in Glinka's opera, 'Life for the Tsar.' To the butcher Minine and Prince Pojharski, a bronze monument was erected in the Red Place in Moscow after another great national movement, when in 1812, as in 1612, the Russian people rose to drive out foreign invaders from their land. It bears the following inscription: 'To the citizen Minine and the Prince Pojharski Russia with gratitude.' The Russians have a genius for these simple manly epitaphs calculated to make the patriot reader's heart throb with glorious memories and pride of country. Such is the phrase: 'Catharine the Second to Peter the First' on the equestrian statue by the Neva; or, 'Lord, bless Russia and the Tsar, save the fleet and Sebastopol,' Korniloff's dying words, engraved on his monument near the Malakhoff Hill. Equally terse and simple but less characteristically Russian is the phrase of Nicholas I. on the monument to Admiral Nievelski in Vladivostok: 'Where

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once the Russian flag is raised, it must never be lowered,' but the original is crisper than the translation.

Nijni proper on the hill is divided into the Upper and Lower Bazaars. Catharine the Great was not impressed by the appearance of the town in her age. She thought it 'situated magnificently but built miserably.' But to-day, though not imposing, Nijni is a clean, pleasant place, with several good streets and many fine houses. From the river the ascent to the Upper Bazaar is made by steep zigzags. The top of the hill is occupied by the Kremlin, which in point of situation, though not otherwise, surpasses the fortress sanctuary in Moscow. It is surrounded by a wall from sixty to a hundred feet high, flanked with eleven towers, which winds down the green slope. From its topmost projecting corner is one of the finest views in Russia, whether in summer, when the Oka and Volga are covered by countless noisy, busy tugs, and long, slowly-moving barges, or on frosty winter nights, when the great snow levels on fettered rivers and on the plains lie obscure and silent under the stars. At such a time, save for the long temporary bridge, the fair-town on the low ground between the rivers is mostly unlit and deserted.

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The fair lasts for only six weeks in July and August. It is divided into Inner and Outer Fairs, the former of which is little more than a mass of offices rented by the agents of important commercial firms. In the Outer Fair there is an enormous assortment of almost every article that the human mind can conceive, and separate blocks of buildings are assigned to each category. The fair will sadly disappoint those who expect to see at every turn pagans from Northern Siberia, Chinese, Buddhists, Tartars from Samarkand or Bokhara. Now that the railways thread Asia, though the actual turnover has not decreased, much of the former colour is lost. That is seen better in the fairs at places like Orenburg.

Odessa is the fourth city of the empire, the third being Polish Warsaw. Its origin was due to the fertile, if sometimes wayward, brain of Catharine II. The foundation-stone was laid in August, 1794. The town is built at the end of the Pontri steppes where they fall in broken declivities to the Black Sea. Near the site was an old Sarmatian colony called Odesseus, which is mentioned by Arrion. Odessa is one of the best built and imposing cities in Russia. But unfortunately the sandstone most available for building purposes decays rapidly, and

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A COUNTRY MAYOR OF THE TOULA DISTRICT

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substantial houses, if left alone, become ruinous in a few years. For this reason, no doubt, only a mass of débris is left of the once prosperous Greek cities on the littoral. Stone for the pavements and larger edifices is brought from the quarries of Italy and Malta. After the bare steppes the eye is gratified, in the parks and boulevards, by numerous gardens and rows of trees, which are kept alive on the unsuitable ground only with the most unceasing care. The northern suburbs that border the steppes are dull and dusty, especially in late autumn, but towards the sea the wide straight streets, the elegant shops and great churches, need not fear comparison with the wealthiest and most advanced cities of Western Europe. Especially fine is the Boulevard Nikolayioski, lined on one side by magnificent buildings, and on the other by trees which are not close enough to prevent glimpses of the sea. In the middle of this promenade is a statue to the Duc du Richelieu, a French emigrant in Russian service who afterwards was a minister under Louis XVIII. He was Governor-General here from 1803-1814, and worked assiduously and successfully for the prosperity of the town. From the sea-front a staircase of massive masonry descends to the harbour. In

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the fashionable and important quarters the prevailing style of architecture is Italian. The Italian colony, which dates from an early period, is numerous and influential. Nearly a third of the population, however, are Jews.

Russia is primarily an agricultural country, and there are few great cities. The ordinary provincial town offers very little of interest either in appearance or life. When the streets are paved, the cobbles are large and uneven. The houses are substantial, but have no architectural beauty. In the centre of each town is a Gostini Door, or Strangers' court, a building with long rows of low-roofed stores, where, with Oriental bargaining, a large proportion of the local business is transacted. For reckoning calculations the merchants use the *stchoti*, a wooden framework about a foot long, and scarcely so broad, with rows of balls strung on wires. Ragged and importunate beggars infest the steps of the numerous churches. The Government buildings are like the private houses, massive but plain, and often the most imposing of all is the railway-station. As builders, the Russians have strong claims to be regarded as the heirs of Rome. Not merely, nor, indeed, principally in Europe, but in Transcaspian Asia and in Siberian valleys their

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structures seem raised not for an age but for all time. It is another question whether the millions lavished on the quays at Dalny might not have been more profitably expended at home. The most striking figures in the streets are sellers of kvass beverages, cloth and fruit, pit-marked nures with diadem-like *kokoshiks*, on their heads, uniformed policemen—of all Russians most harshly misjudged in this country—armed with sword and revolver, and in the evenings *dvorniks* or janitors. There is much dust and untidiness and general symptoms of *nostalgie de la boue*. In the principal thoroughfares stand lines of peasant cabmen or *izvostchiks* clad in warm *kaftans*. Fares are extraordinarily cheap, and one can drive a long distance for threepence. They are laid down by the town council and marked on the most obvious place in the vehicle, but these fixed prices are invariably disregarded, and the fare is bargained for before starting. This, though a small point in itself, is in full agreement with and may be used to illustrate a prominent feature of Russian life. 'The Russian,' said Hertzen with much truth, 'of whatever station he be, avoids or breaks the law continuously wherever he can do so with impunity.' A devotee to orderly system and precision would

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receive more shocks in a week's stay in Russia than in a lifetime in Germany. Nor will the practical, humdrum Occidental be much comforted by the assurance that there are compensations in a club-like, genial spirit which pervades; if the sceptic would only believe it, the whole people accept the confusion with imperturbable good-nature. The Slavophils themselves cannot deny this trait of the national character, but explain it *more suo* by affirming that whereas Western Europe is ruled by external, Russia moves along the path of internal, order and justice.

Since the introduction of railways the country gentry have gone for the winter season not to their Government capital, but to Petersburg or Moscow. The increased facilities, however, of social and intellectual intercourse, and the existence and results of the revolution, have disturbed to some degree that 'eternal stillness' which hung over the provincial towns in days when we drove from their gates for three weeks on end without getting anywhere. But, on the whole, the standard of culture and intellectual interests is lower than in corresponding English cities, and in the smaller district towns the few really educated people that have drifted or been flung there by an unkindly

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fortune are gradually drowned, as Tchekhoff says somewhere, like weeds, in the flood of littleness and commonness round them. Life in the prosperous commercial families is marked by extreme hospitality and unsophisticated material comfort, but by homeliness of manners and sterility of thought and conversation. Their chief amusements are card-playing, gossip and *goulaniyé*—that is to say, driving in the fashionable promenades. Few survivors remain nowadays of the old type of wealthy Russian merchant so admirably portrayed by the dramatist Ostrovski, illiterate, hard-headed, contemptuous of fashion, proud of his class, autocratic in his family, with an almost superstitious reverence of the *ikon* and the Tsar. Among his successors a not inconsiderable number have acquired a superficial polish in Paris and London, but have lost much in strength and energy.

Standing out from their drab surroundings are the representatives of the *intelligentia*, the real windows, as P. Struvé remarks, which let in light from Western Europe, the heirs of the Cossack tradition of stimulating popular struggle against the Government. This term is not applied to the educated classes as such. These include priests, officials, and the aristocracy, whereas the *intelli-*

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gentia was middle-class, and distinguished by its hostility alike to State and religion. They were mostly professional people engaged in law, education, and medicine. Alone, they and the students who recruited their ranks never ceased to denounce and make war against the evils of bureaucratic government, and sacrifice unsparingly money and life in the cause of popular reform. Themselves, professedly non-religious, their mission with its long roll of martyrs took on the note of a religious crusade, and this was accentuated not only by their terminology, often reminiscent of the works of the Fathers, but to a greater extent by their unworldliness, asceticism, fervour, and purity of moral life. A critic was actually struck by the echoes of Orthodox psychology in the wild speeches of the Second Duma Left. And for this unequal struggle, and their services in wresting a constitution, the defects in the character of both students and 'intelligents' were overlooked or condoned. Their culture and knowledge were of a limited nature. By culture they understood not creative art, but either such things as canals and bridges, or the diffusion of knowledge among the uneducated peasants. They produced practically no literature. Their atheism was not the result of

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mental and spiritual wrestling, but imposed by traditions and lightly assumed. They had no interest in philosophy, and despised metaphysics. Abstract principles they denied altogether. They held that life has no objective meaning, and that evil being the result merely of social mistakes can be reformed by purely external measures. Hence the more consistent 'intelligents' permitted the use of all means, including hooliganism and murder, leading to the desired end—the material prosperity of the people. Their traditions choked individuality, and yet neither as a class nor personally were they disciplined. Deficient in historical training, they formed their misty schemes with grandiose visions of popular aspirations and risings, and with a pathetic confidence in the possibility of political miracles, which the revolution rudely dispelled once for all.

In speaking of the work and character of the *intelligentia*, I have used the past tense, though the term survives, and will survive to active use, for this reason. In both aims and nature, Russian observers agree that vital changes have entirely modified the old type, which can hardly be regarded as longer existing. Profoundly disappointed and disillusioned with the results of the

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revolution, which they almost entirely directed, they fell from their soaring heights to depths of dejection, from which they have not yet risen. At the same time their moral fibre was slackened. The abolition of the censorship opened the sluice gates to a veritable flood of pornographic and sensational literature. Politically, again, the October Manifesto cancelled all reason for the peculiar nature of their activity. Public opinion finds utterance in the Imperial Duma. But among the advanced middle-class liberals, many of the virtues and shortcomings of the *intelligentia* will undoubtedly survive. And though Russian Christian observers think otherwise, as may be readily imagined, and though—which is a rather more important matter—history warns us that such *volte-faces* are far from impossible, it is especially difficult to believe that they will change their attitude towards a discredited and discarded religion.

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A POLISH JEW

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VII

WHITE RUSSIA

WHITE Russia is the name given to the upper basin of the Dnieppr, bounded on the south by the River Pripet, and on the north by the Eastern Dvina. The name is said to allude to the colour of the peasant dress. The four Governments of Vitebsk, Smolensk, Mogilyeff, and Minsk, occupy about a twentieth part of European Russia, and the population numbers over seven millions, of whom five are White Russians. The rest is made up of Great Russians, Jews, Poles, and Lithuanians. Here the purest Slavonic type is preserved. They have not blended with other stocks, as the Great Russians with the Finns and the Little Russians with the Mongolians. The Tartars came no farther west than Smolensk, and from Poland and Lithuania the only immigrants were noblemen, and these were few.

The earliest inhabitants of the country were of Finnish race. These were ousted by Lithu-

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anians, and they in their turn receded before three Slavonic tribes that moved north from the foothills of the Carpathians. Settling in their new homes, these fresh-comers occupied themselves with agriculture, hunting, and trade. Excavations of their *kurgans*, or barrows, have shown that they had already mastered the rudiments of civilization. In the Kieff hegemony they maintained their own princes, and towns like Smolensk and Potolsk were from an early period wealthy and populous centres of commerce. In the thirteenth century, however, the Tartars swarmed into Kieff, and White Russia, rent by internal dissension, could no longer withstand the pressure of Lithuania, but became voluntary subjects of their vigorous neighbours to the west. The subjection was not looked upon as a conquest, and the Lithuanians, still pagan and uncivilized, took on the White Russian religion and culture. But these happy relations were broken off after the marriage of the Polish Princess, Hedwig, and Vagailo of Lithuania in 1387. One of the terms of this match insisted on the adoption by Lithuanian King and people of the Catholic faith. The introduction of Polish influence affected adversely the position of the Russian peasantry.

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The White Russian language had no longer any official status. There followed all the ferocity of religious persecution, and the Polish seigneurs inaugurated a system of serfdom much more oppressive than was ever felt in Central Russia. Under these miserable conditions masses of the peasants fled to the unoccupied steppe, and the rest, as a Polish writer notes, 'prayed to God that Moscow should come.' It was only in the seventeenth century, however, that Moscow won suzerainty over the northern districts, and only at the end of the eighteenth was the whole of White Russia annexed to the Great Russian empire. At the date of the emancipation, the country had not recovered from the Polish régime. Harrowing and well authenticated descriptions are given of the prevailing poverty. As corn-laden barges moved along the Dvina to Riga, it was no uncommon sight to see hundreds of starving half-naked creatures who knelt on the banks praying for bread, and threw themselves on the food flung to them, and tore at it like wild beasts. To-day White Russia is one of the poorest and most backward parts of the empire.

In the north the scenery is of the Great Russian type, though the land occasionally rises into hilly

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ground. But in the low flats of the south the wet country known as Poliesk, or 'the forest region,' the traveller, however unobservant, is struck by certain peculiar features. It was once apparently all one vast lake which drained into the Dnieppr, but the outlet becoming choked, the stagnant water formed the marshes characteristic of this part of White Russia. Even now when more than six million acres have been reclaimed by drainage, some of them extend continuously for over two hundred miles. In the upper Pripet basin the woods are everywhere full of countless little channels which creep through a wilderness of sedge. Alone the right bank of the Pripet rises above the level, and is fairly thickly populated. Elsewhere extends a great intricate network of streams with endless fields of water-plants and woods. For the most part Poliesk is oppressively dreary. In the drier spots the earth is carpeted with meadow saffron and asphodel. But over the bogs vapours hang for ever, and among these reeds in autumn there is no fly, nor mosquito, nor living soul, nor sound, save the rustle of their dry stalks. No scene is more characteristic of the inhabited places than the infinitely melancholy picture, often witnessed from

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the train itself, of a grey-headed peasant cutting reeds, standing up to the waist in water.

The White Russian can be recognized without much difficulty. He is sturdy of figure and of middle height, not so broadshouldered or thick-set as the Great Russian, nor so tall and graceful as the Little Russian. He has not the dignity and vivacity of the former, nor the calm debonair bearing of the latter. On the whole, his thin face with the lightish brown hair, the fine-cut features, and the gentle glance of the grey or blue eyes leaves a favourable impression. His most characteristic garment is the white or light grey overcoat for both sexes, called *svitka*, which is girdled by a broad belt, and whose colour possibly gave the country its name. The peasants don this on all State occasions even in broiling summer days when they receive guests or pay visits or go to church. In winter it is worn over the sheepskin. Near the towns, however, factory-made goods are ousting home-spun cloths. In speech the White Russians are nearer akin to the Little than to the Great Russians. Where the latter use the letter *l* and *b* in the middle of words before a consonant or at the end of words they both use a short *u* sound. Thus, where the Muscovite says *volk* (wolf), the

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Mogilyeff peasant says *vouk*. Unaccented *o* and *e* become *a*. Thus the literary word for 'head' *golová* is in the White Russian dialect *galavá*. Accented *o*, on the other hand, becomes often *ou* or *uo;* thus for *dom* (house), the White Russian says *duom*. The letters *t* and *d* of the official tongue are represented by sibilant sounds. *Teecho* (quietly), for example, becomes *tséecha*. There is no White Russian literature, and it is difficult to see the cogency of the arguments advanced by those who deplore that Great Russian alone is taught in the schools. In Little Russia the case is slightly different. There a literature has been produced, small in bulk, but of fine quality. But in both districts at the present day the speech of the people can be considered little more than a patois, and Imperial considerations must take precedence of sentimental.

The huts of the White Russians are generally isolated, and are as primitive and unornamented as those in the forests by the White Sea. The villages are small. One of more than a hundred and fifty houses is very rare, and hamlets of ten, or even five, are not infrequent. The dirty yellow dilapidated roofs, the absence of gardens, the wretchedly-built outhouses and hovels themselves,

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all suggest an atmosphere of poverty. The peasants naturally seek higher pay elsewhere, and White Russians especially are employed in the hard, comparatively unremunerative, railway and river work. Thus in more than one respect White Russia is the empire's 'Ireland.' No one who has ever read it can rid his mind of an infinitely sad picture drawn by the poet Nekrasoff of one of these workmen bent over a shovel with sunken eyes, bloodless lips, and feet swollen by long standing in the water. The struggle for existence in this country has made the inhabitants in money matters careful and close-fisted to a degree far removed from the free and easy generosity of the Great Russian temperament. Intimately connected, too, with their poverty is the besetting vice of drunkenness, perhaps more prevalent here than in any district of the empire. This weakness is mercilessly exploited by the Jews, who in many places hold in their hands absolutely everything, and whose abuse of their power causes one to understand, if not sympathize with, the hostility that, together with religious prejudice, finds expression in the *pogroms*. The level of education is low. In White Russia there are no intellectual classes. Everyone who has passed the secondary schools seeks refuge else-

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where. There are but few factories and works, which profoundly accelerate the mental, if not moral, development of Russian peasants, and those that do exist are managed by Jews or Germans. There is no single big administrative or cultural centre, and in three Governments there is no *zemstvo*. The great bulk of the landlords are Poles, who are out of touch with, and despise, the peasants. All these causes contribute to retard intellectual progress.

In this backward state of the White Russians it is natural that the economic and religious ideas of a former age still obtain. Thus the 'big family' system, nowhere surviving in Great Russia, is still common here in spite of adverse conditions, such as the impoverishment of the people and an ever-increasing scarcity of land and difficulty in finding work. A 'big family' sometimes comprises fifteen adult males and thirty or even fifty members. The head of the household, called *batska* by the grown-up men and women, and *dyadska* by the children, directs the common labour, controls the money, and looks after the behaviour of the family generally. He is the counterpart of the Servian *domachin* and the Great Russian *bolshak* or 'big one.' He is surrounded with marks of respect.

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TEA-SELLERS AT A COUNTRY RAILWAY STATION

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At table he sits in the place of honour in the corner under the *ikons*. Before bread is broken he says grace. At the other end of the table is the mistress's place. On one side sit the women and on the other the men, in places of seniority. The first to eat is the master of the house, and the others begin to eat in order after him. He plays the most important part at festivals, especially at the times when honour is paid to the dead. It is he who summons their souls to the meeting, pours out wine for them, and sets it on the window-sill for them to quench their thirst by night. Nowadays, however, his power is more limited than formerly. Unfairness, inexperience, idleness or drunkenness, lead to the dissolution of the family, or the transference of the mastership to a younger member. When a son complains of his father to the village council, generally the father's side is taken. But often both are punished, the son because he does not obey orders, the father because he cannot enforce them.

To the family frequently belong the daughters' husbands, in cases where these are poor. But this position is not considered enviable; a rhyming proverb says that their portion is as the portion of a dog. When there are sons, a daughter does not theoretically receive land. In practice, however,

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there is often a formal agreement, and an industrious shrewd son-in-law comes to have as much influence as any of the original members. Occasionally the family adopts entire strangers through lack of working hands or capital. By bringing his property and labour to the household, the new-comer and his family acquire a right on its movable and immovable goods. In this way landless peasants obtain land. The position of the White Russian woman is good, unless she be a widow with young children in an unbroken family. They have their own private property apart from the common wealth, the dowry, which, however, is seldom in money, and is added to by poultry-keeping or personal work. As with the Great Russians, though neither people is indifferent to the charms of female beauty, marriages are settled less for romantic than for economical reasons, less for a pretty face than 'golden hands.' They have, however, a proverb: 'Take not her who is covered with gold; take her who is clothed in wisdom.'

Amid all the dirt, squalor, and poverty, there is, however, much that is attractive and even picturesque. Such, for example, are the ceremonies at the festival of Ivan Kupalo on the mysterious night between the 23rd and 24th of June, with the pro-

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cessions, the wheels burning on high poles, and the blazing bonfires. In many districts on the same night honour is paid to the Rusalka, or female Water Spirit. The young unmarried women choose a Rusalka from their company, and also a little girl, who is called the Rusalka's daughter. They crown them with garlands. They also make a straw figure in the likeness of a man. Then the Rusalka with dishevelled hair casts off her clothes, or remains in a shift only, and leads the band to a lonely place singing, 'I will bring the Rusalka to the forest, but I myself will return home. I will bring the Rusalka, aye, to the dark forest, but I will return to my father's court.' They gather the dry brushwood to make a fire. Then they throw the straw figure upon it, leap round and across the flames, and sing the Kupalo songs. There are countless analogies, such as Adonis and Astarte, to this midsummer pair of dieties, Kupalo and the Rusalka, that stand for powers of vegetation and fertility generally.

The marriage ceremonies are peculiarly intricate, and bear distinct traces of the system of capture as well as purchase. Thus when the matchmakers approach the bride's parents, they inquire, after preliminary conversation on general topics, whether

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their hosts have a heifer to sell. If their suit is considered favourably, they are told that there is one for sale if there were merchants. Again, after everything is settled, when the groom pays his formal visit to the girl, he takes a company of his friends and drives up noisily to her house. But there they are at first refused entrance as if they came on a hostile errand, and only after bargaining and promises of 'fairing' are the courtyard gates opened. Of the many curious and instructive burial customs, one or two may be mentioned here. As the cart with the dead man's daughters sitting weeping on the coffin passes a house, the master of which was on bad terms with the deceased, he comes outside, kneels on the ground, and takes up a pinch of dust, which he shakes in direction of the funeral, saying, 'You were a good man. This I give to you.' That is to pacify his enemy's spirit that he may not do him harm from his now powerful position among the dead. In the grave are often put tobacco, bread, and vodka, to cheer the soul in its loneliness, and candles to light the dark path in the other world. If the grave is already occupied, money is put in it so that the dead man may buy a place for himself, and not be in danger of ejection. He takes with him also

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means for his sustenance, a carpenter his axe or a musician his instrument.

In the life of this uneducated and imaginative people, ghosts, bogles, and spirits, naturally play an important part. Their worst foes are the Wood-One, with his enormous height, his loud voice, and blazing eye, and the shaggy Water-One, with his great beard and green hair. These, together with all their male and female progeny, are manifestations of that Unclean Power which is ever about the White Russian's path and about his bed, and spieth out all his ways. In fact, to see the Devil you have only to spit thrice in a strong wind and say, 'Devil, Devil, show your tail!' Illnesses are also signs of the Devil's forces. They are nearly all personified. The fever that haunts the dwellers in Poliesk is an ugly old woman who creeps up to the sleeper and kisses him, and will not part from him. But then, she may be tricked in various ways. Once a sick man expecting her visit pretended to be dead. He lay down under the *ikons* and bade his relatives weep for him. When the fever came and saw them weeping, she believed him dead, and went away. You may also frighten her, for instance, by firing a gun over the invalid, for she is a great coward. Even after an illness has laid her hand

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on a man, she may often be driven out if you adopt bold enough measures. You may, for example, place the sick man face downwards on the threshold, and jump three times on his back. Death, the other world, and transmigration of souls into stones, animals, and so on, are regarded from a curiously realistic standpoint. There is one White Russian story which illustrates the folly of extravagant lamentation over the dead. Once there died a girl whom her mother loved dearly. The mother wept long and bitterly, and desired much to see her dead daughter. So the neighbours advised her to go to church at night on the festival of All Souls. She did so, and on the stroke of midnight she saw her daughter hauling after her with great exertion a barrel full of tears. From that time the mother wept no more.

In addition to the evil spirits there are others who, if propitiated, show favour. First among these are the House-spirits, to whom the peasants pray: 'O Tsar Domovoi, O Tsaritsa Domovitsa, with our little children we beg your favour to feast with us.' Each of the outhouses is in the guardianship of a kindly spirit. At every turn traces of the worship of water, fire, and earth are evident. No White Russian will spit into the fire, and few

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housewives will lend fire to their neighbour, lest the luck of the home go with the embers. When a family moves to a new house, they carry with them ashes from the old. They take, too, a clod of earth. As the Smolensk peasants say, 'Such earth is useful for the health. You go to another strange little country: there the climates are other, there even the water for our brother can do great harm. But strew your own little earth on the water, and then no land can do aught.' The Godhead for the White Russian is of many persons. St. Illya looks after the thunder, St. Eury wild beasts and cattle, St. Froll horses, St. Nicholas the corn-lands. A peasant was asked as to the number of persons in the Godhead. He replied: 'God knows how many Gods there are. The chief, we must suppose, is one, and Jesus Christ is his son. But the Holy Spirit is not God, but God's spirit.'

Wise men and women possess great power in the lonely villages among the marshes and forests. They are generally people who live in some isolation, such as millers. They have given their souls to the Devil. The peasants show them great respect, forbearing even to mention their names among themselves. One may know a wizard as

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follows: Take a bit of the cheese which is eaten before Easter, and carry it in a little bag under the armpit all through the Fast. Then at the Easter midnight service, when the priest proclaims, '*Christós voskrése*'—that is to say, 'Christ has risen'—you must whisper after the pope, 'I have cheese,' whereupon all the wizards in the church will come up and ask for it. Only it is not wise to give it to them.

Conditions are changing fast in White Russia. Year by year decreases the number of those old-fashioned villages, where there is neither samovar nor kerosine, and where no one can read or write. The people are becoming conscious of the need and benefits of education. And though there is still much ignorance and wretchedness, one may feel assured that as the draining of the marshes has expelled those agues and fevers which made the White Russian prematurely an old man, so the constant multiplication of schools will effect, in the not distant future, a steady progress in material and intellectual development, and enable this part of the Russian race to occupy a higher place than it does at present in the national life.

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A DANCE IN LITTLE RUSSIA

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VIII

LITTLE RUSSIA

To the south and south-east of White Russia lie the three Governments of Tchernigoff, Poltava, and Kharkoff, which constitute the romantic and fascinating country known as 'Little Russia,' a country where, as Count Aleksai Tolstoy wrote with glowing enthusiasm, 'everything breathes of plenty, where the rivers flow brighter than silver, where the gentle steppe wind rustles the grasses, and the farm buildings are lost in cherry groves.' The name originated in the fourteenth century to distinguish the land round Kieff from the Great Russia, whose centre was Moscow. The other title given to this district, the Ukraine, means properly 'the border,' or 'the frontier,' a term one might have expected to accompany the expansion of Russian territory in every direction, but associated once for all with Little Russia, which was for centuries the border with Poland. The population of the three Governments numbers nearly

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eight millions, and the density is considerably greater than is the average rural district in the rest of the empire. In the course of their history the Little Russians have become blended with Mongolian and Turkish stocks, not only through the women seized in Cossack forays, but also by the peaceful absorption, at an early date, of settlers, left by the nomadic peoples on the steppe. But here also, as in Great Russia, it is the Slav blood that predominates.

In appearance and character the Little Russians present many interesting points of contrast with their Northern kinsfolk. They are less muscular and massively built, but more finely proportioned and taller. The average Little Russian has grey or brown eyes and brown hair, which in old times was shaved off, with only one long lock left on the crown. This gave rise to the Great Russian nickname 'tufts,' to which the Little Russian retaliated with the epithet 'goats,' in allusion to the flowing Muscovite beard. But nowadays the tuft and the long drooping moustaches are seldom seen except in out-of-the-way villages. A holiday crowd in Little Russia is marked by gay and harmonious colours. The men are clad in flaming red trousers and blue *fhupan*, or coat, the women in green

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woollen jackets, which are sleeveless and ornamented with bright patterns of checkwork. The width of the men's trousers still faintly recalls the days when they were 'as broad as the Black Sea.'

The Little Russian character is not marked by the energy, the practical shrewdness, the enormous vitality, of the North. There is something less vigorous and softer in it which corresponds with the milder southern skies. The very movements, except in the dance, are slow, and even lazy. No more typical Little Russian scene can be imagined than a peasant pacing languidly and leisurely along the steppe road by a hayladen cart drawn by musk-coloured oxen and urging them sleepily on—'*Tsob-Tsob-Tsobáy.*' When he listens to a humorous story that would send the Great Russian into fits of hearty laughter, not even the tips of his moustaches tremble. In the absence of real strength of will is often met an unreasoning obstinacy. To family bliss or misfortune the Little Russian is peculiarly sensitive. He loves to sit with a neighbour over a bottle of vodka and philosophize tearfully on the mysteries and troubles of life. In grit and resolution the women are much superior to the men. They figure abnormally high in the list of criminals.

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They are frequently the heads of families. Formal divorce is hardly known yet in Little Russia, but in such cases the female is hardly ever the wronged or downtrodden party. Anyone at all familiar with this country must be struck by the force of character in the women's faces. Their general position is one of remarkable freedom. Over a large part of the country the married women set aside Mondays as a day for themselves, on which they work for their own profit, have parties, or sew a dowry for their daughters. In the choice of marriage partners the young people enjoy an independence unknown in Great Russia, and hence there is room for a considerable degree of courtship and romance. The parents confine themselves to the sensible caution: 'Choose a bride not with your eyes, but with your ears.'

In religious belief nominally they are almost all Orthodox, and this unanimity has been ascribed, perhaps fancifully, to the persecutions suffered under Polish rule. But as a matter of fact a salient feature in the Little Russian character is scepticism. House-spirits and water-nymphs inevitably people the villages and shady ponds. Generally, however, in spite of a comparatively low intellectual standard, there is a striking absence of superstitious

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fancies. The people attach no importance to religious dogmatism of any kind. There are practically no old believers and no sectarians—a sure sign of religious indifference. For rationalistic propaganda, however, they do not offer a fertile field; their nature is too dreamy and poetical. Thus Bielinski's remarks, quoted above, while admittedly questionable with regard to the overwhelming majority of the Russian peasants, are only partially true of the Little Russians.

Psychologically the most prominent feature, however, is their æsthetic taste, which stamps itself on every aspect of Little Russian life. Its presence is felt in their literature in a refined and restrained imaginativeness which has no parallel in the Great Russian works, careless as a whole of everything but force and truth. It lies like a delicate bloom over their songs. The old *dumas* as compared with the northern *bwilinas* have less verve, less epic dignity, less sweeping breadth. They are more lyrical and romantic. They tell especially of the Cossack's parting with mother or sweetheart, his sufferings in Tartar captivity, and his longing for home and children, and of that other hero of the Steppe, the *tchoumak*, or caravaner, who went for salt and fish to the Black Sea and the Sea of Asoff

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facing sand-storm and snow-storm, aroused every morning by cockcrow from his first waggon, and over whom if he died on the solitary Steppe his fellows reared a little *kurgan*. Among the thousands of Little Russian songs, somebody has said there are few that would make a young girl blush and many that would make her weep. The naïve sentimentality of this remark—the critic was surely a Russian or at least a Slav—contains a large measure of truth. Most of these airs indeed are melancholy, full of an unsatisfied indefinable craving for something beyond mortal reach, and a tender sorrow, whose expression, however, has in it more of conscious art and less of the real human suffering that chokes the songs of the Great Russians. The *dumas* can be heard no longer. The race of old blind *kobzars*—the *kobza* was like a guitar—have passed away for ever, just as the singers of the *bwilina*. In both cases, however, a large proportion of their themes has been rescued by antiquarian research. The place of the *kobzars* is now taken by *lirniki*, who enliven the horse fairs with more recent compositions or satirical ditties on the events of the day.

But the æsthetic temperament of the Little Russians is seen also in their material surroundings

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and ordinary life. From this source springs their pleasure in pacing up and down their gardens, dreamily admiring the sunset or the cherry blossom. These charming gardens, full of cherry, apple, and pear trees, are frequent in every village, and sometimes they enclose even apricot-trees and vines. Amid their bright whites and reds stands the hut with its trim straw roof and walls of plaited wickerwork covered by a thick layer of light-coloured clay. Some villages are composed of both Great and Little Russian houses, and no more glaring contrast can be imagined. Quite foreign to the Little Russian taste are their neighbour's untidiness, sameness, and dirt, and the whole spirit reflected in the Scottish proverb, 'the clartier, the cosier.' The interior of the *izba* is as clean as the outside. The floor, walls, ceiling, and stove are of evenly-moulded clay, and all shine spotlessly white. There are lines of *ikons*, for, however indifferent to their religious signification, the Little Russians love the black and gold colours of these 'gods.' Gaily patterned towels hang round the room, and the shelves are bright with crockery. On the window-sill are flower-pots. The table is invariably covered with a white cloth, on which is a loaf, or at least a crust of bread. Many houses have a 'but' as well

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as a 'ben.' Life is not so easy now as in the days when Count Tolstoy was struck by its atmosphere of plenty. Land is scarce. Masses of the people have emigrated to settlements in Siberia. On the whole, however, conditions are comfortable, and rarely is the summer table set without the favourite dishes of pork and fruit. Very different are the salt steppes of the Kalmucks, where, as the saying goes, even the bug is food.

Little Russia lies on a gentle slope which descends towards the marshes of Poliesk in the west and the steppes in the south. Like the Central Black-earth districts, it comprises three divisions: the wooded uplands of Tchernigoff to the Diesna, thence forest-steppe to the Vorskla, and south of that river the steppes proper. In the third region the climate is continental, but in the northern districts the winter, though long, is not severe, and there are frequent thaws, while the summer, for all its drought and heat, is yet neither leaden or burdensome. The charm of its lazy fragrant sleepiness is reflected with poetic sympathy, exquisite colour, and unexaggerated fidelity, in the opening passage of Gogol's first story:

'How intoxicating, how luxurious is a summer day in Little Russia! How languishingly hot are

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BLESSING THE GROUND BEFORE SOWING: LITTLE RUSSIA

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those hours when midday shimmers in quiet and sultriness, and the blue immeasurable ocean of the sky, bent vault-like and voluptuously over the earth, seems to be asleep! All steeped in passion he clasps his beautiful one in close aery embrace. There is no cloud on him, no murmur on the plain—everything is as it were dead. Only above in the depths of heaven a lark trembles, and its silvery song flies down aerial steps to the enchanted earth, and from time to time the cry of a gull, and the clear note of a quail is echoed over the steppe. Lazy, with never a thought—like aimless revellers—stand the cloud-piercing oaks, and the blinding strokes of the sunbeams illumine whole marvellous masses of leaves, while on others they fling a shadow dark as night, so that only in strong gusts of wind will they shiver with gold. Like emeralds, topazes, and sapphires, ethereal insects float over the many-coloured gardens shaded by the stately sun-flowers. Grey ricks of hay, and golden stooks of wheat, are set together as in camps over the cornland, or wander like nomads over its immensity. Broad boughs of cherry, plum, apple, and pear trees, bent under the weight of their fruits; the sky and its bright mirror; the river, in green proudly-raised frame—how full of

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tenderness, of abandonment, is the Little Russian summer!'

The country is poor in mineral wealth, which is not found nearer than the basin of the Don. But for agriculture, nothing could equal the decayed vegetable matter, known as black earth, which covers, with a thick layer of several feet, a dangerous subsoil of loose sand. Clover and lucerne attain astonishing heights, and single stalks of hemp stretch up for twenty feet. The peasants fear little save the visitations of locusts, and the spring floods that sometimes wash away wide tracts of plough-land and leave gaping ravines in the fields. Isolated from the village are the *khutors*, or farms, surrounded by thick gardens with scores of hives, for in Little Russia the bee is almost a household pet. Round about range sheep-pens and cattle-sheds—the field work is done almost entirely with oxen. And beyond them, and as far as the eye can reach, is a waving sea of yellow corn. The villages, on the other hand, lie for the most part by winding silvery rivers or long dreamy lakes, whose banks in spring are covered with endless beds of crocuses and hyacinths. In the glamour of still summer evening the Ukraine is extraordinarily beautiful. It

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pervades Pushkin's 'Poltava' with a magic charm. The straw roofs shine like gold, and the walls like silver; the reaches of the river gleam under the moonlight, and the air is balmy and steeped in the scents of flowers and cornland. With the passage which I have quoted above, describing a sultry noon, may be compared another from the same inexhaustible gallery, where the unerring sureness of touch makes one vividly conscious of the fragrance and freshness of late evenings:

'Do you know the Ukraine night? Oh, you do not know the Ukraine night? Gaze upon it! From the middle of the sky the moon looks round her; the infinite dome of heaven spreads out and stretches itself still more infinite; it glows and draws breath. All the earth is in silver light; wonderful is the air, at once cool and sultry and full of softness, and setting in movement a tide of fragrance. O night divine! Enchanting night! The woods stand motionless and fascinated, full of gloom and flinging far their gigantic shadows. Quiet and calm are these ponds; the chill and darkness of their waters are held grimly in the murky green walls of the gardens. The virgin groves of hayberries and wild cherry-trees stretch out their roots timidly

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into the coolness of spring wells, and ever and again their leaves lisp, as if angry and protesting when that fair fickle courtier, the night breeze, steals up in a flash and kisses them. All the landscape is asleep! But above in the sky everything is breathing; everything is marvellous, everything is sublime. And in one's soul, too, is illimitable space and wonder, and crowds of graceful silver visions rise up in its depths. O night divine! Enchanting night! And suddenly everything awakes, woods and ponds and steppe. The Ukraine nightingale pours forth his swelling music, and you fancy that the moon herself listens entranced to him in mid-heaven. . . . Quiet, as if bewitched, the village slumbers on the height. Still whiter, still more beautiful in the moonlight, shine the groups of huts; still more blinding do their low walls stand out of the gloom. Hushed are all songs. Everything is at rest. Pious folks are already asleep. Only here and there are narrow little windows lit; only here and there on their thresholds is a belated family finishing the evening meal.'

But there is one more feature of the country about which I have said nothing. As one drives through the cornfields on dusty, windless days in

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autumn, when the air is laden with heavy odours, one is conscious suddenly of a coolness in the atmosphere. That comes from the Dnieppr. Ere long its stream is revealed to the gaze, stretching out as calm as the sky and as vast as the sea, and in a moment one forgets dust and heat and weariness. For six hundred miles this historic and magnificent river forms the Eastern boundary as it flows toward the Black Sea from its marshy source in northern White Russia. In the parching steppes it would be hard to conceive anything more impressive. One feels no surprise that it has so powerfully affected the Little Russian imagination, and inspired great works of art—pictorial like those of Cuindji, or literary like this sublime passage of Gogol, where enthusiasm can scarcely contain itself:

'Wonderful is the Dnieppr in calm weather, when his brimming flood moves freely and smoothly through the woods and hills. He does not ripple; he does not roar. You look and you do not know whether his majestic breath is moving or not; and you fancy that he is all a sheet of glass, or that it is a blue mirror-like road of immeasurable breadth and endless length that flows winding over the green world. Pleasant, then, is it

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for the hot sun to gaze from the heights and plunge his rays into the coolness of the glassy waters, and pleasant, too, for the woods on the banks to be imaged brightly in the stream. The woods with their green wavy branches! They crowd together, along with the field flowers, at the edge of the water, and bending over gaze into it and have never their fill of gazing, never their fill of delight in their own bright reflection; they smile to it and greet it, nodding their boughs. But in the midstream of the Dnieppr they dare not look; into that nothing peers save the sun and the blue sky; few are the birds that fly to the midstream of the Dnieppr. Glorious river! There is no river like him in the world.

'Wonderful, too, is the Dnieppr on a warm summer night, when everything is lulled to sleep, man and beast and bird, and God alone majestically surveys heaven and earth, and majestically makes His raiment to shake. From it are the stars poured, the stars that blaze and gleam over the world, and that all are reflected in the Dnieppr, every one together. Every one the Dnieppr holds in his dark breast; not one escapes him, save only it be extinguished in heaven. The dark wood strung with sleeping ravens, and the hoary

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shattered hills that overhang him, strain every effort to hide him if but by their long shadow—in vain! There is nothing in the world that could cover the Dnieppr. Blue, blue he flows with even flood through the night as through the day, visible as far as human eye can see. Shrinking delicately from the cold of night he hugs the banks, and there gleams a silver stream that flashes as the blade of a Damascus sword, and then once more his blue waves fall asleep. Then too wonderful is the Dnieppr, and there is no such river in the world.'

IX

THE STEPPE

In the south of Little Russia commence the grassy treeless plains that stretch to the Black Sea and the Caspian, and that from the dawn of history have formed a pasture-ground for the flocks of nomad peoples. Over their unbroken expanses have wandered in succession Scythians, Sarmatians, Goths, Hunns, Khasars, and at last, about the sixth century of our era, came settlers, certain Slavonic tribes that moved down the Western rivers, some of whom burnt while others buried their dead. But almost from the beginning these were exposed to the constant raids of light-mounted Turkish nomads, and later on a more formidable race named Polovtsi. The old chronicles reflect with a certain bald grimness the dangers and difficulties that surrounded the colonist's life. 'In spring the peasant will ride out to plough, and the Polovtchin will come, strike the peasant with an arrow, take his horse, then ride into the village,

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A CIRCASSIAN

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seize his wife and children and his goods, and set fire to barn and all.' Under this endless and hopeless struggle the steppes became gradually depopulated. The settlers fled to the north behind barriers of natural and artificial fortifications, and only a few oases were left along the rivers of the Donet's basin. The desolation was completed by the Tartars. What remained of the population sought refuge in Muscovite Russia and the banks of the Vistula. The country became once more empty save for Mongolian watch-fires.

The recolonization of the western steppes was the immediate result of the social and religious oppression inflicted on their Russian subjects by Lithuania, and especially Poland. To escape from serfdom, the peasants fled in masses toward the uninhabited prairie, and in that rich but disturbed country the peculiar conditions of life bred a race of soldier-settlers. To these was given the Tartar name of 'Cossack,' which means, strictly, mounted guerilla troops. At the same time down the Don and the Volga, moved the discontented elements of Great Russia. All these formed armed bands that moved out into the steppe, and engaged in fishing, cattle-breeding, and agriculture. Thanks to them, the southern frontiers became more

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secure. But in both districts the Governments pressed hard in their track. From the sixteenth century, Moscow began a systematic colonization of the steppe; and repressive measures had to be adopted to prevent the peasants flocking southward on their own accord, as the Chinese at the present day pour into Manchuria, threatening to 'celestialize' Vladivostock itself. Towards the west, colonization was due only indirectly to the Polish Government. Enormous tracts of the recovered land were granted to great seigneurs, who settled them with their serfs, promising these twenty or thirty years of absolute freedom. But the new inhabitants came into conflict with their predecessors, and the result was to send the free Cossack ever farther into the steppe, and to open ever wider districts of its fertile plain to the plough.

In the borderland between Slav and Turk, the Cossacks succeeded in forming free and powerful republics, in which the military features became accentuated. Their ranks were constantly swelled by peasants, debtors from higher classes, broken men whose lives were forfeit, and lovers of fighting, booty, and freedom. 'The Tsar,' said one of their proverbs, 'rules at Moscow, and the Cossack on the

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CIRCASSIANS DRILLING

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Don.' But the more civilized the empire became, the sharper was the contrast with the lawless braves of the steppe. Not only did their raids on Turk and Tartar cause bloody reprisals and diplomatic difficulties with the Sultan, but also they turned not infrequently against the Slavs themselves. Moscow, while all the time expanding through their service, now avowed them allies and brothers, now, when convenient, swore that they were subjects of the Turk. As the land became ever more settled, the points of difference became acuter, and at last the turbulence and dissatisfaction of the Cossacks found vent on a grand scale in the rising of Stenka Razine. To this day his name is enshrined with a magical halo in the songs of the Don that, together with reminiscences of Turkish forays and the capture of Azoff, tell of how he crossed the air on a carpet of felt, and changed into a fish to swim the Volga. Not till the time of Peter the Great were decisive measures taken for the pacification of the Don. Ten thousand Cossacks were then deported to the Ural and the Caucasus. In the Ukraine, at an early date, the Polish King endeavoured to introduce an invidious system of registration. Six thousand men were to receive pay, and be em-

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ployed as irregular forces, while the rest were to be made once more serfs. This measure roused a storm of wrath among the Cossacks, and from that time their bickerings and chequered warfare with the kingdom to the west never ceased. When defeated, Poland, agreed to enormous augmentations of the numbers of the free Cossacks; but occasionally she was victorious. Finally, in the seventeenth century, the Cossack hetmen appealed for protection to the Orthodox Tsar. Moscow acceded readily. The Cossack army was to be maintained at a strength of six hundred thousand men. They were to elect their own hetmen, and have full powers of local administration and receive foreign ambassadors, except from Poland and Turkey. But these new relations proved no more satisfactory than the old; and after Mazeppa's defection to the Swedes, though the mass of the Cossacks declared for the Tsar, Peter took the opportunity of curtailing their dangerous power. The Dnieppr Cossacks were banished to the Crimea, as the Don to the Caucasus. Under Anne they were allowed to return to their old home, but they found the changed and settled country sadly dull. It was not suited for them, nor they for it. Catharine took their stronghold,

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confiscated their lands, and once more expelled them. The Ukraine became an integral part of Russia. With the annexation of the Crimea, their peculiar position in the European part of the empire was an anachronism. Among the Cossack communities in Southern Russia to-day, some of the former features still obtain. They provide horses and accoutrements for their military service at their own expense, but are not liable to direct taxation. Much of the old social equality is retained to the present day in the villages down the River Ural, where at the beginning of the fishing season mounted pickets are stationed along the banks to keep off not only poachers, but also children whose cries might frighten the fish. But it is especially on the southern frontier of Siberia, and as far east as the Amoor, that the Cossack life most nearly resembles the old conditions, and breeds a rude, vigorous race, admirably adapted for outpost duties and guerilla warfare.

Of all the Cossack bands none have equalled in fame or exploits the Ukraine Zaporoztians, or Cossacks 'beyond the rapids' of the Dnieppr. In that remote and secure position they entrenched themselves on one of the islands scattered below the shelving ridges of rock that break the smooth

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surface of the river. This fortified place, or Setch —the word is connected with *zasieka*, a forest clearing for military purposes—they changed altogether eight times. Men who cared for nothing else in the world had a filial regard for their Setch. When expelled by Peter and Catharine they took a clod of her earth to their new home, and whenever they rode out on forays or set sail in their pirate craft to swoop down on merchant vessels or harry seaboard towns in the Black Sea, all the Zaporoztians turned round before they were out of sight of the Setch and said: 'Farewell, our mother! May God keep you from all misfortune!' In war-time their ataman had power of life and death over his troops, but the Setch itself was like a great free republic or, as Gogol says, 'a close ring of schoolboy friends.' 'The difference was only in this, that instead of sitting under the rule and rubbishy instructor of a schoolmaster, they made raid after raid on five thousand horses; instead of the meadow where schoolboys play at ball, they had infinite free expanses, where in the distance the swift-moving Tartar would show his head and the Turk glance stern and motionless in his green *tchalm*.' In the constant expeditions from this island stronghold there is not lacking the religious

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RETURNING FROM A HUNT IN THE CAUCASUS

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note that runs like a coloured thread through all Russian history. Against Catholic, Mohammedan, and Jew, the Cossacks were a kind of Monastic Order that fought as defenders of the Faith. In election to the brotherhood the only questions asked of the newcomer were whether he believed in Christ and the Holy Trinity, and whether he belonged to the Orthodox Church ; the only request made was that he should sign himself with the Cross. Life in the Setch was full of a rich barbaric colour ; there were companies lodged apart and jealous as houses in a public school, rough conceptions of knightly honour, heroic drinking, sudden alarums of Tartar raids, elections of atamans, anointed with mud, terrible punishments for theft or murder, where the living were buried together with the dead ; there were horses and boats, dirt and rags and breeches of gorgeous purple, smeared ostentatiously with tar. But there was nothing more interesting than the men themselves, none of whom died a natural death, many cruel desperadoes, many wild spirits that found pleasure only in fighting, many that knew ' what Horace was, and Cicero and the Roman republic. . . . Lovers of a life of arms, of golden goblets, rich brocades, ducats and reals could at all times find work here. Here only

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worshippers of women could find nothing, for even in the neighbourhood of the Setch not a single woman dared appear.' There is a fine picture by Repin of their composing a scurrilous message to the Polish King, and an immortal story by Gogol, which with unflagging spirits and a freshness and largeness, a vibrating sympathy and splendour of language hardly to be found outside Homer, describes the festival life in the Setch and the prowess of her stalwart sons abroad.

Not all the steppes—the Russian is pronounced *styaip*—are rich lands of black earth. There are wide expanses of sand, as at the mouth of the Dnieppr, and salt, as in the country north of the Crimea, and clay, as in the plains bordering the Caspian. In the fertile steppes, too, where the villages lie in ravines along the small rivers that are like Syrian wadies, the soil is gradually drying up. 'When man comes,' there is a saying, 'water goes.' It is this last type of steppe whose main features will be baldly enumerated here. In appearance it is practically the same as the veldt or the prairie, but scenery is largely looked at with the mental as well as the physical eye, and the steppe appeals to one with a force which neither the prairie nor even the veldt can exercise. It is indeed intimately con-

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nected with the Russian history and literature. For miles in certain parts the level is strewn with bleached skulls that are the sole record of forgotten battles. You can see them from the train to Astrakhan lying in countless numbers like white stones. And to its fascination are due some of the finest word-pictures in the Russian language, like those of Gogol, or Levitoff, or Koltsoff, the Russian Burns, who, as a boy, herded cattle on the steppe. Characteristic of his work is a poem where a mower-lad sings of these boundless plains in their virgin beauty, of the scythe swishing through the swaths of grass, while the south wind blows cool in his face. From their even floor from time to time rise *kurgans*, some old forts or watch-places, others the barrows of nomad chieftains, such as ride through Vasnietsoff's canvases. Many of these have yielded valuable finds of an art influenced by Greek culture, and the steppe shepherds sometimes spend days on them in search of buried treasure, while their flocks dot the brown steppe white. And one will not drive far before meeting one of those curious figures, which the peasants call 'stone women,' made of stone not found nearer than four hundred miles, with their faces turned invariably to the east. Whoever left them, they have grown accustomed, one fancies, to

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the lonely steppe. Many of them have been taken to adorn *khutor* gardens, but it needs ten strong bulls to tear them away and bring them to the farm, while a single yoke can convey them back. Superstitious peasants carry their sick children to them, kneel and embrace them, and offer wheat ears and kopecks. They and the *kurgans* alone break the expanse of the steppe. The roads are enormously wide, often hundreds of feet, and from them break off others that run mysteriously toward some village or *khutor*, hidden under the horizon, or lose themselves in the vastness.

At the present day little of the steppe remains virgin. But in spring it is covered with a carpet as wonderful as that which Marlowe saw spread under the Eastern conqueror's chariot-wheels. Amid the green growth are plants with bright flowers like poppies that colour broad distances red, blue, or yellow; and then, except that the grasses are lower, the steppe is for all the world like what it was when Taras Bulba and his sons rode through it, with their black Cossack hats alone seen above the verdure on their way to the Setch:

'The farther they went, the more beautiful became the steppe. At that time all the south, all that expanse which is now New Russia, right up to the

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THE HUNT FOR A PRISONER

Black Sea, was a green virgin wilderness. Never had plough passed over the immeasurable waves of wild growth; only the horses, hidden in it as in a wood, trampled it down. Nothing in Nature could be finer. The whole surface of the earth was a green-gold ocean splashed with millions of different coloured flowers. Through the thin high stalks of grass twinkled blue and lilac cornflowers, and the yellow broom spread forth its spiry crest; the pale milfoil variegated the surface with its parasol-like leaves; an ear of wheat, carried Heaven knows whence, was burgeoning amid the profusion of wild plants. Partridges, protruding their necks, pecked under the delicate roots. The air was full of a thousand different bird-notes. In the sky poised hawks, unmoving on outspread wings, and fixing unmoving eyes on the grass. The cry of a cloud of wild geese flying in the distance was echoed in God knows what distant mere. From the grass a gull rose with measured flight and bathed luxuriously in the blue waves of the air. There, she has soared up to the heights, and only twinkles like a black spot. There, with a turn of her wings, she flashes in the sun. . . . Deuce take you, steppes, how fine you are!'

By the middle of June, however, moisture fails,

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and the appearance of the steppe changes. The gay colours disappear, the grass becomes brown or blackish-grey. The brilliant poppies and cornflowers are replaced by weeds or plants that need less water, such as the sage and feather grass. The earth dries up and cracks, and the air is full of thin dust raised by the burning wind. Only at the time of the autumn rains does the steppe revive again, but then there are not the rich hues of spring. Yet even in the oppressive days of summer, when there is no wind, nor cloud, nor noise, the steppe is never without its melancholy beauty. Here lies a strip of green sedge amid the scorched brown grass, there is a solitary tree. One is absolutely alone: only rarely is there a line of waggoners or a mounted Nogai Tartar on a kirghiz *aul* with the circular, dome-shaped *yurt* of slender wooden rods covered with thick felt. The distance is hazy and lilac-covered, and if the sky is blue and cloudless it seems to tremble. Or possibly—as the Russian writer loves to depict—amid the stillness something may suddenly burst in the air, and a gust of wind whistle in the steppe grass. The small scrub is torn from the earth, and with straw and feathers caught in a black, whirling column of dust that sweeps ever larger and faster over the plain. Against the

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winter winds not the strongest animal can stand. Horses and cattle are seized by the whirlwind and borne along, despite themselves, till their strength is exhausted, and they fall panting to the ground. They sometimes die in such storms in thousands.

In summer nights the darkness falls quickly. Toward the Black Sea the closed salt *limans*, or river mouths, gleam with a phosphoric light. Nights spent on the steppe, in whatever weather, leave an unforgettable impression, whether in winter, when one waits at a desolate post-station till a storm abates, or in summer, when one drives under the moon on such a night as Tchekhoff has pictured in his story, 'On the Steppe':

'In July evenings and nights the cries of quails and corncrakes are no longer heard, the nightingales no longer sing in the bushy hollows, there is no longer the fragrance of flowers; but none the less the steppe is still beautiful and full of life. Scarce does the sun set and darkness wrap the earth, ere the day's weariness is forgotten and everything forgiven and the broad-bosomed steppe draws easy breath. As if because it does not see its age in the gloom, the grass raises a gay, youthful rustling, which you do not hear during the day; rustling,

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whistling, crackling, the basses, tenors, and trebles of the steppe—all are blended in a continuous monotonous sound which makes it good to remember and be melancholy. Its unvaried music lulls you like a cradle-song; you drive on and feel yourself falling asleep, but then from somewhere or other is borne to you the broken, alarmed cry of a wakeful bird, or a vague sound like a human voice: a kind of wondering 'ah-ah!' is wafted abroad, and your doziness flies away for ever. And sometimes you drive past a dell with shrubs, and you hear the bird that the steppe people call the 'sleeper' crying out to somebody or other, 'Sleep, sleep, sleep'; and another one laughs or bursts into hysterical wailing—that is the owl. God knows for whom they cry and who hears them on that plain, but their cry is full of melancholy and complaint. There is the smell of hay and scorched grass and faded flowers, and the smell is heavy, luscious, and sweet.

'Through the mist you discern everything, but it is difficult to define colour and outline. Everything seems different from what it really is. As you drive on, you spy all at once standing in front by the side of the road a silhouette like a monk; he does not stir, he waits and holds something in his

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INTERIOR OF A SIBERIAN PRISONERS' WAGGON

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hands. Is that a robber? The figure nears and grows; there, it is even with the carriage, and you see that it is not a man at all, but a solitary bush or great stone. Such motionless expectant figures stand erect on the ridges, or cower behind the *kurgans*, or peep out of the steppe grass, and they are all like people, and inspire suspicion.

'But when the moon rises, the night becomes pale and dark. As for mist, it is as though it had never been. The air freshens, and is transparent and warm. You can see clearly in every direction. You can even distinguish the separate stems of grass by the road. For a long distance you can mark white skulls and stones. Suspicious figures like monks seem darker and look more threatening in the light background of the night. Oftener and oftener amid the monotonous rustling of the grass, something's astonished 'Ah-ah!' startles the still air, and you hear the cry of a wakeful or dreaming bird. Broad shadows sweep over the steppe as clouds over heaven, and if you look long at the mysterious distance, misty, wonderful forms rise up there, and are piled one on the other.... It is a little eerie. But you glance at the pale green star-spangled sky, on which is neither cloud nor blot, and you understand why the warm air is still, why

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Nature is on guard and fears to stir; she grieves and rues to lose but a moment of life. Only at sea and on the moonlit-steppe is it possible to judge of the infinite depth and immensity of the sky. It looks down caressingly with a strange, tired, beautiful glance, and beckons to itself, and that caress makes your head giddy.

'You drive on an hour or two. . . You come unexpectedly on a silent old man *kurgan* or a stone woman, set up God knows by whom or when; a night-bird flies noiselessly over the earth, and little by little the legends of the steppe, the tales of chance-met travellers, the stories of your steppe nurse, recur to the memory and all that you yourself have seen or imagined in your soul. And then in the hum of insects, in the suspicious figures and *kurgans*, in the blue sky and the moonlight, in the flight of a night-bird, in everything you see and hear—you begin to feel the triumph of beauty, to feel youth and the bloom of strength and a passionate thirst for life; the soul responds to that beautiful sad country, and longs to fly over the steppe with the night-bird. And in the triumph of beauty, in the excess of happiness, you feel a tension and a yearning, as if the steppe were

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A KIRGHIZ WOOING

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conscious that it was alone, that its richness and inspiration perish to no purpose for the world, sung by nobody, heeded by nobody, and through the gay rustling you hear its anguished despairing cry for a singer, a singer !'

X

THE CRIMEA

In form the Crimea is a rough parallelogram attached to the mainland at the top right-hand corner with a second smaller parallelogram projecting from the bottom of the same side. It is divided by a wall of hills into two distinct parts. Of these the northern is much the larger part, and is closely connected with the steppes beyond the Perekop Isthmus. The southern portion, on the other hand, is a narrow stretch of seaboard, by history, physical nature, and climate quite different from the rest of European Russia. But since the incorporation of the peninsula in the empire in 1783, this second division has played such a noteworthy part in Russian life, and its scenery, like that of the Caucasus, laid such a powerful hold on Russian imagination, that while Lithuania and Esthonia, Poland and Finland, must be in the present work sacrificed to considerations of space, it would seem unjustifiable to pass over the Crimea.

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Nearly the whole country is now Russianized, but the bulk of the population is still Tartar. Great numbers emigrated to Turkey immediately after the annexation, and also during the Sebastopol campaign, when in the Perekop district alone of three hundred villages there remained only deserted *djurts*.

The steppes in the north with their continental climate, their rich spring colours, their clouds of dust, and burnt, cheerless, appearance in summer, have little to distinguish them from the steppes in Russia proper. They contain numerous salt lakes, but few fresh-water wells or streams. Towards the north and east the inhabitants of more than fifty villages, mostly Tartar shepherds, collect the spring rain-water in shallow pits called *auts* for use throughout the rest of the year, when the rivulets from the north slope of the hills become dry. There are, however, numerous artesian wells in the Eupatoria district and by the lagoon of the Sivash, or Rotten Sea, across which on a string of islands runs the railway from the mainland. Its low foul-smelling shores are bare of vegetation, and after stormy weather, when the east winds drive the waters before them, form broad expanses of slimy mud. A few swans, pelicans, and gulls,

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breed on its islands, but in general it is dreary and lifeless: both birds and fish are rare. Into it flows the Salter, the only large stream in the Crimea, which in winter is a foaming torrent but in summer little more than a succession of pools. On the seaward side the Sivash is enclosed by a narrow strip of land about eighty miles long and varying in breadth from four miles to a quarter of a mile. This is called the Arabatsk Point. Along it, passing a few scattered forms, is the road that leads to Genichesk, where it joins the mainland, and farther north to Melitopol. This narrow level between two seas is a well-known place for observing mirages.

In minerals, apart from iron in the Kertch peninsula, the Crimea is not rich, but salt is obtained in large quantities from the numerous lakes that lie along its northern shores, separated by long low sandbars from the Black Sea and the Sea of Azoff. Where these lakes are fed by streams, their beds are covered by layers of mud brought down in the spring floods. The mud consists largely of vegetable matter, whose peculiar chemical qualities make it efficacious for the treatment of such diseases as scrofula, gout, or tuberculosis. This cure was employed by the Tartars, who dug

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a hole in the dried bottom of the lake into which they put the invalid, covering him except for his head with the freshly exposed mud. The method followed at the present day is substantially the same. The invalid is sunk into his mud bath and left for about twenty minutes with an umbrella sheltering his head from the hot sun. Then he is washed with warm water and carried back to his room, where he sweats in pools and will drink as much as ten tumblers of thin lemon-flavoured tea.

The Crimean hills are of volcanic origin, and a continuation of the Caucasus Mountains interrupted at the narrow Strait of Kertch or Yenikali. There are three ranges. The first of these does not extend beyond the west part of the peninsula, and does not rise above nine hundred feet. Near Simferopol it merges in the second line, which in places attains the height of over seventeen hundred feet above sea-level. In it are some fine precipitous spurs, deep gorges, and romantic wooded glens, but above all it is distinguished by isolated peaks, such as the pyramid of Tepé-Kermen that rises abruptly from the gardens three miles south of Baktchi-Sarai, or the still more interesting cone of Mangoup-Kalé that, from the west on the Ai-Todor road, looks per-

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fectly unclimbable. Its lower slope is wooded, but above that a sheer bastion of rock stands out precipitous against the blue sky. In medieval times the fortress, surrounded on all sides with walls and towers, whose ruins crown the top, must have been wellnigh impregnable. The rock is honeycombed with watch-posts and chambers. This stronghold may have been constructed by the Greeks, but more probably it was made about the sixth century by the Goths, who retained their hold on the Crimea more than a thousand years after the rest of their vast empire slipped from their grasp. As late as the seventeenth century a Gothic people, living under the shadow of Mangoup-Kalé, was distinguished from its neighbours by physical type and Germanic language. The third division of the hills is much the highest and finest of the three, especially on its steep southern side. Towards the north, like the lesser ranges, it falls in a gentle slope. From Feodosia in the east it runs along the coast to the south-western corner of the peninsula at Cape Fiolente, where a monastery of St. George occupies the probable site of the Tauric temple, in which human sacrifices were offered to the wild goddess identified by early Greek travellers with Artemis. At their

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most westerly point the hills rise almost overhanging the seaboard, so that seen from a passing steamer they are much foreshortened. Near the Baidarski Gate they retreat two versts from the sea, and this distance is gradually increased to three versts at Kikenets, four at Limeni, six at Yalta, and eight at Alushta. This narrow littoral, sheltered by the hills from the north, is the Russian Riviera.

In the third range there are no outstanding solitary peaks as in the second. Throughout nearly its whole extent stretch the so-called Yaila, a fairly even summit plateau, broken only by a few low rocky eminences. The Yaila begin above the village of Kutchuk-Koi, and for some versts are narrow. Over Limeni they widen to three or four versts, and then contract again above the valley in which Yalta lies. Beyond Nikita this plateau reaches its greatest breadth, and extends almost to the coast. Here it is called Babugan Yaila. Not much farther eastwards is the highest point in the Crimea, Roman-Kosh, which rises to about five thousand feet above sea-level. But the finest hill scenery lies north of Alushta. There the range breaks into three separate branches—Karabi, Demirdji, and Tchatyr Dagh. This last hill was

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known to the Greeks as Trapezos, the Table Mountain, and the name well suits its massive quadrangular summit, from which precipices fall away on every side. The Tartar name, the Mountain of the Tent, represents with equal vividness the appearance from a distance of the white regular walls. The fine valley between it and Demirdji is one of the vital points in the peninsula, and through it runs the excellent carriage road between Simferopol and Alushta. Beyond the little fishing village of Tuak the hills are much lower, and split up into several chains and separate groups. At Feodosia the main chain ceases altogether. From that point to the middle of the Kertch peninsula stretches level steppe, and there, again, low hills run eastward, which geologically belong still more closely to the Caucasus.

These ranges throughout their whole extent are rich in admirable scenery, but much of it remains unappreciated, for the fair weather Yalta tourists are the last persons in the world to stray from the bridle paths. There are countless narrow gorges with festoons of water plants, cold, clear, hurrying streams, waterfalls shrouded in spray, stalactite caves and deep ravines, with precipitous walls whiter than the snow which lingers in them late in

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ROYAL PALACE, LIVADIA, CRIMEA

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summer. In the delightful valleys of the Alma, Belbek, Tchornaya, and Salghir, yellow cornfields alternate with dark green woods of beeches and walnuts, and here and there frowning bluffs of cliff jut out boldly from the grassy ridges. Their romantic glens contain the finest gardens of the Crimea, for there is no sharp break with the steppes northward, and hence both northern and southern floras are found in great variety and abundance. For the most part the hills are wooded. Oaks, pines, beeches, and cypresses grow in profusion on the lower slopes, and the higher are clothed with maples, ashes, elms, and pines. The beech woods particularly are thick and close, with frequent clumps of giants, each one of which is more than fifteen feet in circumference. But just as in the Urals, the Crimean forests, however picturesque their great masses of colour appear from a distance, oppress the traveller actually passing through them with their silence and lifeless monotony. Save for the jay and woodpecker, there are no birds, and only rarely is the earth carpeted with grasses or flowers. On the hills the climate is more moderate than in the steppe. From half-way through April to the end of October summer weather prevails, balmy, without being oppressively

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hot. Especially pleasant are the months of September and October, when one rainless day succeeds another, and only at midday a few rare clouds obscure the sun. In such weather on one of the narrow rock-aûtes — though these are lamentably few—one is in an interspace of blue world above and green world below, 'where never creeps a cloud or moves a wind.' The winter season is quite unlike the even thawless cold of Russia. There are continual sudden changes from mild days, when overcoats are a burden, to sharp frosts with blustering gales. But in the passes, which are called *bogaz*, these storms sometimes stop communication for whole weeks on end.

On crossing the hills to the coast between Cape Laspi and Alushta one passes immediately several degrees farther south. It is this stretch of seaboard that constitutes the Crimea for the average Russian. In climate it is incomparably better than any other place in the western half of the empire. Its mild dryness is irresistibly suggestive of Nice and Hyères, and its vegetation of the country districts round Pisa and Florence. Above seven hundred feet the flora corresponds with that of the Tuscan Apennines. The lower slopes are covered with evergreens that are nowhere met with in

European Russia. But it is not so much these that give its peculiar colour to the south coast as the innumerable varieties of trees in the parks and gardens. Above all the dark green of the cypress strikes the eye of the visitor from the north. But there are also cedars, laurels, box-trees, palms, pomegranate trees, magnolias, and olives. Every slope is full of creeping plants, especially the wild rose and the vine. Even in December or January but two or three warm sunny days are needed, and fresh tender grass appears, the buds open on the roses, and little leaves uncurl on the oaks. In the depth of winter at Yalta Tartar boys sell great bunches of snowdrops and violets.

But in truth there is no winter on the south coast of the Crimea. From time to time, indeed, there are cold snaps with an east or west wind—the latter is the more unpleasant, but the rarer—and at night frosts may be registered up to twelve degrees. Soon, however, the sun shines forth, the sky clears and the snow that has lain for a day or two melts away. As a rule, there are only nine days when snow falls and seven when it covers the ground. No wonder, then, that this district appeals so strongly to Russians of delicate health, taking refuge here from the searching cold of Petersburg or Moscow.

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In fact, the summer weather continues with scarcely a break the whole year through. There is no real spring or autumn. The only distinction between the seasons is that in the earlier part of the year there are a few, not more than a dozen, fogs, lasting only some minutes, and at most half an hour, which rise from the sea to the hills, and that in the latter part there are occasional raw days with wind and rain. But from June to October every day is serene and glorious, especially in the morning and at nightfall. In the middle of the day the sun's heat is roasting, but even in the hottest hours there is not the sultry stifling dryness that oppresses Russia proper, and at noon a cool sea-breeze and a gentle shower of warm summer rain clear the air. Perhaps the very finest time is the earlier part of October, when everything is quiet and the sky spotlessly blue, when there is no longer the summer heat, and from the sea comes now not a cooling wind, but a soft warmth. Thus for thirty weeks on end one may count with certainty that to-morrow will be just as delightful as to-day and yesterday. Half the year basks in conditions which in the north last at most only seven or eight weeks, and then not every year.

The soil on the southern slope is mostly clayey,

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and hence where the cliffs extend close to the shore great masses of them frequently break off and splash into the water. Generally the sea is very deep, and but a little way off land the lead finds bottom at only three hundred feet. Bathing begins about the end of May; for the greater part of the coast, unfortunately, and markedly so at Yalta and Alushta, the sea bottom is stony. The steep hill-slopes are picturesque at every season, but especially so in spring, with their masses of vines and strawberry trees, with the dark green of the moss and fresh light green of the grasses, with the blossom of cherries or laurels, through which ring the notes of the birds of passage flying north. And admirable, too, at a distance from a boat are the countless silver threads of waterfalls leaping plumb to the sea, spilling in the clear air their 'thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke.' It is this Crimean south coast even more than the vales of Ida whose fragrance and loveliness are mirrored in Tennyson's 'Oenone':

'The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen,
Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine,
And loiters, slowly drawn. On either hand
The lawns and meadow-ledges midway down
Hang rich in flowers, and far below them roars
The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine

In cataract after cataract to the sea. . . .
And overhead the wandering ivy and vine,
This way and that, in many a wild festoon
Ran riot, garlanding the gnarled boughs
With branch and berry and flower thro' and thro'.'

The most striking approach to this coast is by the road from Sebastopol to Yalta, where on the summit of the pass the grey rock-walls of the Baidar Gate frame in a remarkable picture of hills, slopes, woods, and sea. Through its extent it is dotted with pretty villas shining white among the vineyards. There are several watering-places, in which, especially at Yalta, living is at all times exorbitantly expensive. Quite near Yalta is the Imperial Palace of Livadia, charming in its gardens and unpretentious simplicity; and also near is the most beautiful spot in the Crimea, the ruins of the burnt palace of Oreanda, a fairyland of cool grottoes, marble colonnades, wild crags, tropical vegetation, and streaming waterfalls.

The modern capital of the Taurida Government is Simferopol on the Salghir. Twenty miles to the south-west in a picturesque valley lies Baktchi-Sarai, the old residence of the Khans. It is still quite an Eastern town, with dogs, dirt, and dancing

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Dervishes. The two-storied Tartar buildings, perched above one another on the hillside, are made of wood and wattle, smeared inside and outside with clay. Towards the streets the walls are blind. The noise and squalor of the town are in startling contrast with the peaceful beauty of the palace gardens. This is the Russian Grenada, and especially in the moonlight the tapering minarets and the gentle ripple of water, whose spray falls on dark cypresses and vines, hold the visitor in that magic fascination which has not yet deserted Oriental cities like Bagdad, or Bokhara, or Samarkand. The palace itself, in spite of restorations, has retained much of its original appearance. An air of melancholy broods over the deserted Council Hall, the tomb marked by simple columns and the famed Fountain of Tears that inspired the poignantly beautiful odes of Mickiewicz and Pushkin.

Another interesting place is Kertch in the extreme east, the ancient Panticapæum, the seat of the Bosphoric Kings. The town is spread out above the shore in the form of an amphitheatre. Most of the houses are adorned with pillars and balconies, and are built of stone. There is a museum of considerable antiquarian importance,

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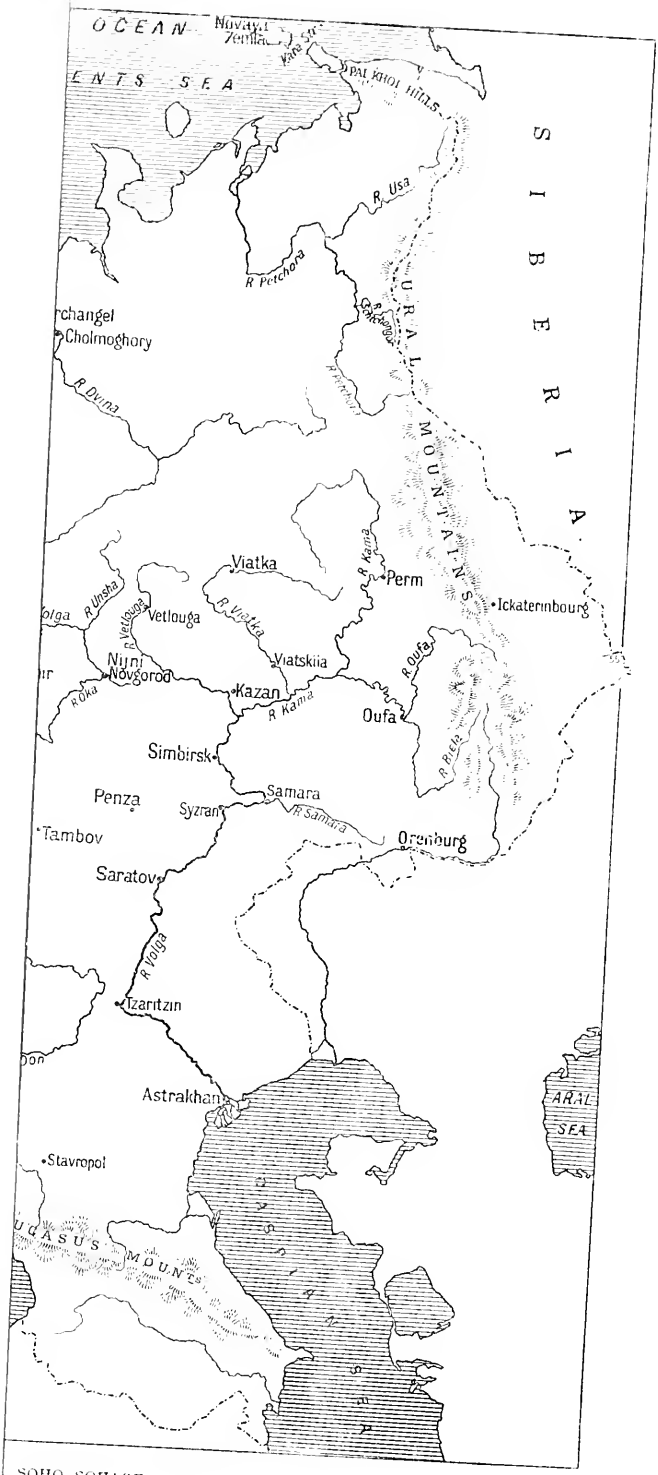
and an old church, part of which dates from the first century. Behind the town rises the Mithridate hill, with terraces scored by excavations. On its summit are a half-ruined tower and the so-called 'chair of Mithridates' cut out roughly in the rock, from which the Pontic King is said to have watched the manœuvres of his fleet. From this point you get an admirable view of the desolate *kurgan*-studded steppe, and the racing firths of the Cimmerian Bosphorus.



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Perm
Riga
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Novgorod
Moscow
Vilna
Smolensk
Minsk
Warsaw
POLAND
Penza
Orenburg
Simbirsk
Ufa
Kharkov
Poltava
Saratov
Astrakan
Caspian Sea
Black Sea
Odessa
Lemberg

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